



Testimony in Support of An Act to Promote Housing Choices (H.4075)

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Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations  
to the  
Joint Committee on Housing  
Massachusetts General Court

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Chairman Honan, Chairman Boncore, and members of the Joint Committee, on behalf of MACDC and our members, I am testifying in support of An Act to Promote Housing Choices (H.4075), legislation presented by Governor Charlie Baker to provide additional tools to help the Commonwealth meet its housing needs.

MACDC represents all 62 state-certified CDCs in Massachusetts as well as 30 other nonprofit organizations that share our mission of expanding economic opportunity across the Commonwealth. CDCs work collaboratively with residents and local governments to identify community goals and develop projects with strong local support.

It is widely recognized that the Greater Boston region needs a dramatic increase in housing production to meet the existing and growing demand for housing, especially rental housing. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and other experts suggest the region needs 435,000 new housing units, mostly multifamily, by 2040.

Community development corporations play a significant role in the production and preservation of much needed housing in Massachusetts. In 2016 alone, MACDC members developed 814 homes, and preserved an additional 829 homes, in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the Commonwealth. Increasingly, CDCs seek opportunities to produce housing outside of urban areas, to achieve multiple goals: increasing the housing supply in suburban and rural areas, creating more affordable choices for families of modest means, and reducing racial and economic segregation across our state.

MACDC supports passage of An Act to Promote Housing Choices (H 4075) and commends the Governor for proposing this legislation. We encourage the legislature to pass a comprehensive and balanced bill, incorporating the Governor's proposal into the Great Neighborhoods legislation already being considered (H 2420, S 81).

Housing development in Massachusetts is challenging for many reasons, including the high cost of development, restrictive local zoning, opposition by residents and/or local government, limited subsidy resources for affordable housing, and in many places a lack of

infrastructure. Yet we need to build new housing everywhere – not just in a few cities. Yet right now, two-thirds of our new apartments are being built in just 10 municipalities.

Many municipal governments want to contribute to meeting this housing need but lack the capacity and/or the tools to succeed. An Act to Promote Housing Choices, if enacted, would facilitate housing production and adoption of zoning best practices. The bill smartly reduces the voting threshold needed to adopt certain, smart growth zoning changes from a super majority to a simple majority. We also want to take this opportunity to thank the Governor for his Housing Choice Initiative which will provide technical assistance and financial incentives to help cities and towns produce more housing. The combination of this legislation and the Housing Choice Initiative represents an exciting step forward.

But we can and must do more.

We recommend that the legislature add inclusionary zoning to the list of zoning changes that can be made with a majority vote. Inclusionary zoning has become accepted as a best practice for municipalities that have strong markets and want to ensure that some affordable units are created. We also urge the Legislature to remove the super-majority requirement for special permit approval, consistent with how special permits are approved in most other states. Furthermore, as a founding member of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance (MSGa), we ask the Legislature to adopt the language changes to H.4075 proposed by the Alliance.

MACDC also believes that the Legislature needs to pass a comprehensive bill based on the key elements of the Great Neighborhoods bills (H.2420, S.81), in particular, those related to project permitting, subdivisions, cluster development, variances, consolidated permitting, board training, municipal plans, frivolous appeals, and housing discrimination.

MACDC and its members stand ready to work with the Legislature and the Governor to craft final legislation and more importantly to help implement that legislation so that it achieves our shared goals of more housing, economic equity and natural resource protection. MACDC is well positioned to support implementation through our statewide network, which includes strong CDCs in most of our major cities, an increasing active Suburban Housing Caucus and rural CDCs serving both Western Massachusetts and Cape Cod. In fact, two of our members are serving on the state's Rural Policy Commission and helping to craft smart rural development strategies for the Commonwealth.

We urge the committee to report favorably H.4075, with due consideration for the additional elements referenced in our testimony. Such legislation would represent a major step toward modernizing our zoning laws to better balance the need to protect our natural resources and ensure citizen participation in development decision while meeting our Commonwealth's housing demands now and for years to come.