



Testimony in Support of H.B. 1726

Chairman Alexander, Vice Chairman Cole and honorable members of the House Standing Committee on Housing, my name is Jennifer Hawkins. I am the President and CEO at Avesta Housing. Avesta is the largest non-profit affordable housing developer in Northern New England. We own and manage over 3,000 homes across New Hampshire and Maine with nearly 4,700 residents. Our portfolio includes housing in Exeter, Antrim, Farmington, Lincoln, Hampton Falls, and Conway.

Avesta strongly supports H.B. 1726. This proposal would require state agencies to evaluate state-owned property and determine if its highest and best use is for development or redevelopment as affordable housing. As you all know, New Hampshire faces an unprecedented housing crisis. The lack of affordable housing options has far-ranging impacts—most especially on employers and the economy. H.B. 1726 requires the state to be part of the solution. By reviewing its real estate holdings to determine if there might be opportunities to sell underutilized or unutilized properties, the state can leverage the expertise and resources of housing developers to create housing opportunities for Granite Staters.

There is a good precedent for this approach. Maine recently adopted a similar proposal regarding review of state land and a few years ago required the Judicial Branch to transfer three closed courthouses to the Maine State Housing Authority for redevelopment into housing. New Hampshire, at the behest of this committee, can adopt a similar initiative that leads to the construction of much needed housing for people who need it most in our communities.

Avesta does have a few technical suggestions for the committee's consideration. First, we would encourage the committee to increase the number of units required to be affordable. Given the land being transferred is a state asset, it seems prudent to maximize the number of affordable homes built as a result. Secondly, we recommend requiring developers to certify the units comply with the affordability covenants via a third-party entity on an annual basis. It is unlikely towns will have capacity or resources to do this on their own. Finally, the process by which the land is sold to a developer should be competitive with a scoring system that evaluates the credibility of the developer and their proposed plan for the land.

We are excited to see this proposal come forward and urge the committee's strong support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hawkins
President & CEO
Avesta Housing