

**Testimony of Christopher Oddleifson, Chief Executive of Rockland Trust
and Chairman of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, to the
Massachusetts State Legislature's Joint Committee on Housing, June 20, 2017**

Chairman Honan, Chairman Boncore and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on legislation to increase the supply of housing in the Commonwealth. My name is Christopher Oddleifson and I am Chief Executive Officer at Rockland Trust and chairman of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.

Rockland Trust employs more than a thousand people working in over 60 Massachusetts cities and towns. The success of our business is tied very closely to the health of the state's economy. From that perspective my message today is very simple: the need for more housing is critical, and eliminating local barriers to the production of new housing is nothing short of an economic imperative.

When I try to recruit experienced staff to Rockland Trust from other parts of the country, there is sticker shock when they learn how much it costs to buy a home in Massachusetts. While our salaries are competitive in our geography and the industry, sometimes the cost of housing is a deal-breaker.

Rockland has bank branches throughout eastern Massachusetts and for a bank with such strong and deep community roots it is deeply troubling how few of our tellers and customer service representatives could now afford to live in the cities and towns that they serve.

The success of every business in Massachusetts depends on the ability to attract and retain qualified employees. That's especially true for the "innovation economy" that has made our state such an economic powerhouse: universities, hospitals and knowledge-based industries.

By every available measure, the lack of an adequate housing supply is a growing threat to our economic wellbeing. In a recent survey by Northeastern University two out of three employers in Massachusetts said that the cost and availability of housing affects their ability to attract qualified job candidates.

Since the 1980s housing production in Massachusetts has dropped well below the nation as a whole, our home prices have increased more than any other state, and our rents have increased to among the highest in the country. Less than half as much new housing is permitted per capita in metro Boston than in places like Seattle, Denver and Portland, Oregon. Those cities -- and others like them -- are becoming a magnet for young, skilled workers who otherwise might settle and raise families in Massachusetts.

There is plenty of demand for new housing in Massachusetts: what's missing is the opportunity to build it. We all love our communities and the tradition of New England home rule, but local land use regulation is getting more and more restrictive and makes it impossible to build the housing we need. Many communities that used to allow construction of multifamily housing -- like the garden apartments that flourished after World War II -- now make it difficult or impossible to do so. Many communities that used to allow the construction of modest starter homes now allow only homes on lots of an acre or more.

In the face of this challenge some cities and towns have continued to plan for growth and shown great leadership on housing, yet these efforts simply aren't enough. It isn't reasonable or realistic for just a few communities to bear a disproportionate share of the state's overall housing needs.

None of these facts is in dispute. The question is how we can come together, as a Commonwealth, to solve the problem.

The approach proposed by the chairs of your committee in House bill 673 and Senate bill 723 would be a major step forward. The bills recognize that some kinds of housing – such as multifamily housing and modest single-family homes on smaller lots -- are essential to varying degrees in every city and town in Massachusetts. It then leaves it up to the discretion of local citizens and local elected officials to determine where those housing types are allowed. As these bills suggest, we need to shift the debate from whether to how our cities and towns allow the housing production we need to support a strong and economically viable Commonwealth

Reasonable people can disagree about the best means of solving our housing supply shortage, but the need is urgent and I urge your committee to accelerate this debate and move a bill forward for consideration by the full House and Senate.