



## TESTIMONY

Testimony on S1766  
Senate Community and  
Urban Affairs Committee  
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Chair Singleton, Vice Chair Stack, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **S1766**. My name is Helen Kioukis, and I am the Policy Manager at New Jersey Future, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for smart, sustainable growth and serves as the convener of the Great Homes and Neighborhoods for All initiative—a statewide pro-housing initiative working to ensure that all New Jersey residents can find an affordable home in a safe, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhood.

We are in strong support of legislation that would facilitate the conversion of New Jersey's vacant and underutilized retail and office spaces into housing and urge you to vote "yes" on S1766. Our affordability crisis continues to worsen because we simply do not have enough homes to rent or buy that meet people's needs and budgets. Housing production in New Jersey dropped significantly after the Great Recession; and nearly 20 years after the start of this downward trajectory, our production rate has yet to rebound. In an analysis of housing underproduction by the organization Up for Growth—which is the gap between the housing we have and the housing we need—New Jersey is one of the 10 states with the most severe housing underproduction level. S1766 would eliminate barriers to redevelopment and help us build the homes we need to close this gap.

Creating a more streamlined system that allows for the repurposing of underused and blighted commercial sites for housing improves the timeline, the costs, and the predictability of these types of redevelopment projects. Pursuing a use variance to convert a commercial property to housing is not straightforward or simple, and it can cost as much as half a million dollars during a process that is not even guaranteed to result in a project's approval. And the more time and money the current process takes means increased costs that ultimately get passed on to New Jersey residents through higher rents and higher home prices.

Converting vacant or underutilized buildings into housing is an important strategy gaining traction across the country with widespread public support. A [poll of New Jersey voters](#) this past fall found that 84% of respondents supported a policy that would allow for the redevelopment of commercial properties into housing. Similarly, a [Pew Charitable Trusts survey](#) from 2023 found that 75% of respondents favored policies that would allow apartments near offices, stores, or restaurants. New Jersey has the opportunity to join this trend by passing S1766. We cannot continue to rely on a patchwork of 564 local policies to address our growing housing supply and affordability crisis.

Thank you, Chairman Singleton and Sen. Wimberly for sponsoring this bill to convert New Jersey's "stranded assets" into community assets. And thank you for your leadership on advancing additional housing reforms to build more homes and improve housing choices across the state.