

August 15, 2023

Dear committee members,

My name is Ryan Gerrity, Senior Resident Organizer for the MH Program at the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, one of the state's five community action agencies that address fundamental issues of economic, social, environmental, and racial justice, and work with people to achieve economic independence.

As we are now seeing with this current natural disaster, simmering issues faced by MHPs are in full display and likely to worsen for many parks and homeowners, heightening the potential (and very real) risk of immediate park closures and the subsequent displacement of hundreds of our most vulnerable neighbors amid an incredibly difficult housing landscape. This new flooding disaster presents several known and new intricate and layered challenges that mobile home park residents must face. There's a pressing need for an integrated and holistic approach to these challenges, which the CVOEO Mobile Home Program (MHP) is ideally positioned to provide.

Photos from the ground:



Figure 1: Mud covered roads and homes in River Run Mobile Home Park in Berlin with varying levels of damage due to differences in elevation. Both homes severely damaged from water intrusion with one unable to be entered to remove items.



Figure 2: Home in River Run Mobile Home Park in Berlin showing extent of the damage. (Photo by JoEllen Calderara)



Figure 3: The interior of a home in Highland Heights MHP in Johnson, gutted to prevent further water and mold damage.



Figure 4: A home in Black River Mobile Court in Ludlow, impacted by water intrusion, gutted to avoid mold growth and being raised on its foundation to minimize future flooding damage.



Figure 5: Aftermath of the flood and total loss home deconstructed by local park owner in Berlin Mobile Home Park in Berlin. (Photo by JoEllen Calderara)



Housing Advocacy Mobile Home Program

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Our in-depth engagement with these communities has afforded us a clear view of the multi-dimensional struggles faced by our residents:

- Complexity and confusion around major recovery resources, including discrepancies in FEMA interactions, coupled with ambiguities and lack of clear procedural directives.
- Lack of legal protection and support against predatory lenders and cheap sale of residents' homes to MHP owners.
- Varied extents of home damage across parks and households, underlining both the severity and nuances of the impact.
- Financial strains intertwine with both immediate needs and long-term recovery, highlighted by the ongoing lot rent charges and emergent crowdfunding initiatives.
- Prevailing communication gaps, revealing the urgent necessity for transparent and accessible central guidance and support HUB that we are still ready to implement with adequate funding.

Together, with dedicated expert volunteers from UVM and long-standing partnerships, we've been diligently primarily connecting in person and remotely with residents from most impacted MHPs, disseminating crucial resources, and facilitating access to recovery support, both immediate and long-term. Furthermore, our upcoming financial support initiative, through private funding, aims to provide basic needs such as water, clothes, and other essentials for affected households. This is a drop in a bucket compared to the needs we have seen on the ground.

We know that CVOEO MHP's role in this recovery phase will be crucial. Our unified approach seeks to streamline the different components of recovery, from sustainable and tangible financial aid and technical support to healthy and stable housing, all grounded in an understanding of the unique circumstances of mobile home park residents and the loss and trauma events like this cause. These current events have again shown us the necessity for creating an Office of Housing Support and Stabilization Services to be housed at CVOEO as advocated in our last testimony. This comprehensive program will support not only mobile home residents but tenants in crisis as well. A year of program operation, CVOEO HAP would require **funding of \$250,000** to support 2 full time employees including all direct project administration costs.

Leveraging a strategic integration of resources, expertise, and community-focused initiatives, our paramount goal is to ensure that each affected individual receives the dedicated support and specialized care necessary to address their unique circumstances, paving the way for a healthy, resilient, and promising future.

Thank you for your attention.

Ryan Gerrity

Senior Resident Organizer, Mobile Home Program