

Mobile Home Program

Po Box 1603, Burlington VT 05402
802-660-3455 ext. 105



February 20, 2020

Dear Honorable Chair Toll and Appropriations Committee members:

I come to you on behalf of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity Mobile Home Program (CVOEO MHP) to support the crucial request for an increase in investment in mobile home parks.

Primarily funded by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCH), CVOEO MHP is the only statewide mobile home residents' advocacy program that, through organizing and education, works to give residents a greater control over their housing by supporting the protection and improvement of their housing rights and living conditions. We strongly believe that government dollars could have a crucial impact in the lives of these important communities who make up the backbone of our state's workforce. By increasing funding of the Vermont Housing Conservation Board (VHCB) Housing programs, you will further help fund mobile home park investments, which are too great to fund through the VHCB's annual appropriation. There are approximately \$30 million in new investments needed over the next 3-5 years, with a funding gap of about \$9 million.

Mobile home parks are a critical form of affordable housing in Vermont as they are a unique and desired niche offering home ownership affordability and accessibility to households with low income but are decreasing as a share of available housing at a time when our State is facing a scarcity of affordable housing for low and very-low income families. This is one of the primary ways that many Vermont working households use to attain the American dream of home ownership. One urgent challenge facing these communities is the lack of availability and easy access to resources to address mobile homes infrastructure repair and maintenance, including water and sewer system upgrades, moving homes out of floodway areas, road improvements, and repair and replacement of old, outdated and abandoned mobile homes.

About 75% of VT's mobile home parks were built over 40 years ago before most state permits or local zoning regulations even existed. 64 parks with 3,095 lots are currently owned by non-profit organizations or resident controlled cooperatives. We recognize that a non-profit and resident-controlled ownership has a beneficial impact on a mobile home park community with the opportunity to build stronger relationships between landlords and their constituents. They also provide greater access to public resources and support, but the biggest barrier to conversion is also the deferred maintenance of infrastructure. When a park is in need of major repairs or has to relocate homes, it is challenging for a non-profit or resident-controlled cooperative to be able to pay for the necessary repairs in a timely manner (which is a requirement enforced by most lenders). This makes it difficult to keep lot rents affordable. Even with minor repairs, it is not unusual for residents who pursue cooperative ownership to have to vote on whether to raise their own rent to cover their mortgage and operating costs. CVOEO MHP has often seen residents voting for higher rent because the money is being re-invested directly into their community and is helping to ensure the long-term affordability of their park for generations to come.

CVOEO MHP believes that immediate actions -- and continued action over the coming years -- are required to tend to the crucial issues affecting the lives, health, safety and wellbeing of these important labor force communities and sustain their existence through legislative action. It is imperative to give our mobile home parks a much needed infusion of financial investment by increasing VHCB funding, so that this critical form of affordable housing is preserved.

Sincerely,

Sandrine Kibuey, Director- VT Tenants & Mobile Home Program/CVOEO