

Mobile Home Program

802-660-3455 ext 108



February 12, 2021

Good morning Senators,

My name is Laura Mistretta and I am a Resident Organizer with the CVOEO Mobile Home Program. I am here to talk to you about the impacts of Covid-19 on the communities we serve, and the changes needed to support elderly, disabled people, essential workers and children who call these communities home in the coming months.

Mobile home parks are a critical source of affordable housing here in Vermont. Many of these communities are small and located in rural parts of the state. As we all know internet access is a challenge in rural VT and mobile home parks are no exception. Moreover, the cost of internet and technology is often a barrier for the people we serve, many of whom are elderly and disabled living on very fixed incomes. And lastly, technological literacy is an additional challenge facing people and should be kept in mind when developing plans to extend technological access. In non-pandemic times the CVOEO Mobile Home Program primarily communicates with residents via phone, mail and in person. The impact of Covid-19 has meant the CVOEO Mobile Home Program is making every effort to ensure that internet access is not a barrier to people being able to access critical resources and exercise their rights.

Access to/comfort with technology is also a significant barrier to people being able to access critical resources such as the Rental Housing Stabilization Program. The CVOEO Mobile Home Program conducted a phone survey of 166 clients we have served over the last 5 years in April and August to determine the impact of Covid-19 on individual households and communities. Through those conversations we were able to inform people about programs like the Rental Housing Stabilization Program and when necessary mail them copies of the application so they could access the program. Often times this was the first they were hearing of these programs. We are grateful to the non-profits and cooperatives who have taken proactive steps to ensure their residents are well-informed. However, we know that not every housing provider or cooperative has the capacity for this type of outreach, not to mention that still leaves out the majority of mobile home parks which are privately owned and operated. There is a real need for proactive outreach to inform people of the resources available to them.

In October of 2020 two communities in Colchester were noticed for sale, a total of 235 lots. Typically the Department of Housing and Community Development hosts an in person informational session with residents to discuss their rights. Due to Covid-19 this informational session was held virtually. Resident leaders expressed concern this would prevent participation from a significant portion of their neighbors. The CVOEO Mobile Home Program responded to the concerns by creating a series of fliers that could be left at people's doors to ensure they were kept informed and able to participate in the sales process even without internet. We were fortunate that we had pre-existing relationships with key resident leaders with whom we were able to coordinate to distribute information as widely as possible. It was

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also fortunate that these communities are located close to our Burlington office. As of now, both communities are in the process of exploring cooperative ownership. If we did not have relationships in the community or easy access to the communities this outcome likely would not have been possible.

The last point I would like to make is there is a clear trend of mobile home park residents we have heard about, who regardless of their financial status, always make sure to prioritize paying their lot rent or have rent automatically withdrawn from their accounts. Due to changes in income or living expenses associated with COVID-19, people are cutting back, utility bills, property tax payments and other housing costs. The CVOEO Mobile Home Program would like to see new federal COVID relief dollars applied to the supportive services component of Emergency Rental Assistance and for flexibility in the type of housing costs that can be covered. This money should support outreach to MH residents and increase flexibility so that people who are trying to do the right thing by prioritizing their lot rent are not left out of the monies meant to support them through these trying times.

Thank you for your time today.

Sincerely,

Laura Mistretta, Resident Organizer – CVOEO Mobile Home Program

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