

H.719 testimony to Senate Economic Development

Thank you, Madam Chair and Committee for the invitation to be here today. H.719, an act relating to housing development and unit rehabilitation is the product of this tri-partisan group of legislators engaging in conversations with our constituents, state agencies, developers, municipalities, the administration, and each other to bring a comprehensive package to the Legislature that addresses the housing crisis by focusing on creating new units for all Vermonters. Why did we put aside political differences to come together to write this legislation? We all saw a need in our communities: Rep Sims and I have a shortage of housing for teachers and staff at our rural schools and for employees at our ski areas and related businesses. Rep Small sees New Americans and others being turned away from their apartments by rent increases with few alternatives within walking distance of schools, stores, and public transportation. Rep Bartley feels the crunch in her district of people who work in Chittenden County but cannot afford the price of housing there, migrating to southern Franklin County to look for homes, further driving up the price of real estate and exacerbating the situation for people who already live and work in Franklin County. We all know older Vermonters who wish to downsize but cannot because there are no smaller homes available to move into. Simply put, we need more units: apartments, single family homes, multi family homes, condominium complexes, ADUs, manufactured homes, so there is something for everyone and for every budget. Some families will need financial assistance to get into their first home; others may need it to rehabilitate existing units and bring them back online. But the goal is to create more units so everyone has a place to call home. We know that the regulatory process, though well-intentioned and designed for a Vermont that was seeing unprecedented growth 50 years ago, needs to be modernized to encompass Vermont's needs in 2025 and beyond. The legislation before you starts this conversation with concepts that we all could get behind and hope your committee will bring forward in your bill. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce it to you.