

To: Members of the Senate Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs Committee and the House Committee on General & Housing

RE: Testimony for the joint public hearing concerning the state of housing in Vermont.

Date: Thursday, February 16, 2023

My name is Karin Ames and I am providing this testimony on behalf of the Statewide Housing Advocacy Programs at CVOEO. We provide education, support, advocacy, technical assistance, and referrals for people and organizations. Our team serves thousands of renters, mobile home residents, and people experiencing discrimination each year. We also partner with housing and service providers, municipal officials, and other organizations to promote inclusive, affordable housing for all.

I am the Education Coordinator with the Vermont Tenants Program and a long-time Vermonter. In 1972 when I was a kid, my family of four moved into an uninsulated 3-room camp at a campground because my parents couldn't find an affordable place to live. Fifty years later, Vermont's housing market hasn't gotten any better. This is not a housing crisis; this is the status quo. You have an opportunity to meaningfully shift that status quo. I urge you to take three actions to support tenants in a housing market drastically out of supply-and-demand balance:

1. **Support increased funding for rental housing subsidy programs.** Already high, rents have drastically increased over the last few years. When a family suddenly receives a \$300, \$500 or higher rent increase, they need support while they search for adequate housing that they can afford and/or ways to increase their income to meet the demand.
2. **Support lowering barriers for renters who are seeking housing.** Resources should also be made available for tenants and landlords that clarify their rights and responsibilities, and these resources should be accessible in multiple languages. It is also vital that we continue moving forward on changes to the rental housing safety inspection system that will increase accountability and supports. This program still requires a sustainable funding source after the ARPA funding is spent.
3. **Support tenant protections and increased funding for retention services.** We have conducted over 1,900 consultations on our hotline in 2022 with a large number of folks facing a threat of eviction. Proposals such as Just Cause Eviction and Right to Counsel provide protections from unnecessary evictions. Retention services can also help prevent potential evictions by resolving issues prior to starting a legal eviction process. These services include increased access to legal assistance, mediation, and social services – essentially dedicated problem solving and access to resources.

Back in the 1970's my family was lucky. After a few years, our landlord offered to hold a mortgage so my parents could buy the camp and my dad had the skills to add on an addition. Today, many families are not so lucky. Shelter, one our most basic needs, should not depend on luck. Thank you for your consideration.

Karin Ames, Housing Education Coordinator  
Housing Advocacy Program, CVOEO