

## **Testimony Before the Vermont House of Representatives**

In Support of Fair Rent Practices and Public Health Protections in Mobile Home Parks

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Chairperson, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Nawar, and I am here as a voice for the thousands of Vermonters living in mobile home parks—many of whom are low-income, disabled, or working-class individuals trying their best to survive in an increasingly unaffordable world. I urge you to uphold and strengthen protections for residents when rent increases are proposed beyond the Consumer Price Index.

Because this issue isn't just about housing. It's about health. It's about dignity. And it's about survival.

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### **When Rent Rises and Standards Don't**

In too many parks, rent goes up—but the conditions stay the same. Residents are told it's just inflation. But they see no improvements to their roads, no upgrades to water systems, no investments in safety or child-friendly spaces. How can that be just?

For example, in one park, the only “playground” is an empty lot. No slide. No swing. Just one broken bench, rusted and unusable. A lone basketball hoop—cracked and sagging, hardly enough for a single child, let alone a community. Meanwhile, street lights took two years to be replaced. There are no street signs, no speed limit markers, and no fences to protect residents....

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### **Public Health Begins Where We Live**

The CDC, HUD, and leading researchers across the U.S. agree: housing and neighborhood conditions are upstream drivers of health.

- A 2023 CDC report highlights that children who live in neighborhoods without safe play areas are significantly more likely to experience obesity, behavioral challenges, and lower academic achievement.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2030 framework specifically lists “access to safe outdoor spaces” and “quality of housing” as two of the top social determinants of health.
- According to a CDC analysis, just 1 in 4 children nationwide gets the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, and lack of access to safe play environments is one of the main reasons cited.

So when a park lacks sidewalks, functioning lights, or maintained playgrounds, it isn't just an aesthetic problem—it becomes a public health emergency.

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## **Water Quality and Infrastructure: A Hidden Threat**

Poor water infrastructure is one of the most dangerous yet overlooked risks in manufactured housing communities.

- The EPA's Safe Drinking Water Information System shows that small and privately managed water systems—like those found in mobile home parks—make up 80% of health-based violations in the U.S.
- A study published by the American Journal of Public Health found that residents of manufactured housing were more than twice as likely to experience water contamination as residents of single-family homes, particularly in rural areas.
- This includes risks from lead, arsenic, and microbial contaminants—each of which can have lifelong impacts on children's neurological and immune development.

And road safety? In some parks, potholes haven't been properly addressed in four years. That's four winters of worsening cracks, four summers of children biking on unstable pavement, and four years of increased fall risk for elders and people with disabilities.

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## **Lighting and Safety Aren't a Luxury**

Lighting is essential. Not just for peace of mind—but for basic safety.

- According to the National Institute of Justice, well-lit streets are associated with a 36% reduction in violent crime, and greater community engagement and walkability.
  - The Federal Highway Administration found that proper street lighting can reduce nighttime crashes by as much as 50%.
  - In mobile home parks, lack of lighting means kids walking in the dark, emergency vehicles missing addresses, and residents feeling forgotten by the systems meant to protect them.
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## **Is It Fair to Pay More for Less?**

When residents are asked to pay more without any return—no improvements in safety, no upgrades in infrastructure, no assurance of clean water—it feels like exploitation, not inflation.

A 2020 report from HUD found that mobile home park residents are among the most rent-burdened populations in the country—paying over 50% of their income on housing, with little recourse when rent spikes occur.

This isn't sustainable. And the downstream consequences are felt in our healthcare systems, schools, and emergency services.

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## **Invest Upstream to Save Downstream**

We know that the most cost-effective public health measures are upstream.

- A study published in Preventing Chronic Disease found that every \$1 invested in walkable, safe neighborhoods yields \$3 in long-term public health savings.
- The National Academy of Medicine has emphasized that housing interventions—such as infrastructure improvements and lead-free water—result in lower Medicaid and emergency care spending over time.

Fix the roads now, and we prevent injuries later. Maintain clean water now, and we avoid hospitalizations. Build safe play areas now, and we reduce obesity, anxiety, and behavioral issues. This is not just smart policy—it's the compassionate, Vermont way.

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## **Final Ask**

If park owners want to increase rent beyond the CPI, they must demonstrate good faith improvements in infrastructure, safety, and living conditions. Otherwise, these increases represent an imbalance of power and a breach of fairness.

I ask that this body:

- Reaffirm and enforce 10 V.S.A. § 6252, and the right to mediation.
- Tie rent increases to transparent, measurable improvements.
- Prioritize the health and safety of residents, especially children and the disabled.
- Support proactive inspections and standards for road, water, and lighting infrastructure.

We're not asking for luxury. We're asking for light. For safety. For dignity. For the right to raise our children in a place where they can run, play, and grow up believing they matter.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to protecting the health and future of all Vermonters.