



227 Water Street, Suite 208
Augusta, ME 04330
207-250-0220
www.growsmartmaine.org

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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 1931 "An Act to Foster Stable and Affordable Home
Ownership in Mobile Home Parks by Amending the Laws Relating to the
Sale of Mobile Home Parks"**

May 23, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

LD 1931 provides a timeline and outlines a process for residents of mobile home parks to purchase the land under their homes, allowing them the opportunity for the security and equity that comes with homeownership.

I was reminded in reviewing this bill of one of the winners of GrowSmart Maine's 2019 Maine Smart Growth Awards, the Charter Oaks Village Cooperative. These residents of the Charter Oaks Mobile Home Park, located on the border of Arundel and Biddeford, were able to purchase the mobile home park, but only after an expensive and convoluted process.

For almost 50 years, this park was owned and operated by a local "mom-and-pop" operator who took good care of the community and knew and cared about the residents, but needed to retire and sell. Not knowing his options, the owner sold the park to a private equity investor from Las Vegas for \$800,000, who immediately jacked up the rents and had plans to sell it off quickly for a large profit. That investor offered it to the residents, after owning it only six months, for \$1.27Million.

On June 11, 2019, after a community organizing effort which began in February, the residents of this park came together and purchased the community to operate it as a resident owned cooperative. By doing so, the resident homeowners took control over the land that sits beneath their homes and now work together to operate the park on a volunteer basis. This allows the resident owners to operate as member shareholders, each having a vote and voice and an opportunity to serve their community.

Given the fact that manufactured housing communities are the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in Maine, with over 600 parks home to an estimated 25,000 households, Charter Oaks is a positive role model for communities statewide, and with LD 1931, more owners and residents of mobile home parks will have the time needed to pursue this option.

With the current housing market in York County and across Maine out of reach for so many people, COVC allows a home ownership opportunity for households of all ages/incomes. Manufactured housing is single level, allowing easy retrofit for those with a disability. It costs nearly one-third less than custom stick built housing, and because of the clustered nature of development in these communities, the infrastructure needed to serve homes also costs much less. Because of these design and affordability factors, manufactured housing communities are often home to a disproportionate share of young families, the elderly and those living with disabilities. MHPs are also one practical solution to the challenge of allowing seniors to age in place.

Here is a photo of Charter Oaks Village Cooperative receiving their 2019 Maine Smart Growth Award:



GrowSmart Maine encourages the Housing Committee to support LD 1931 to allow more residents of mobile home parks to become homeowners, with all the security and wealth creation that comes with it.

Nancy E. Smith