

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the housing committee:

I am in support of LD 1723, "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Manufactured Housing Communities to Prevent Excessive Rent and Fee Increases.

I live in the largest manufactured housing park (MHC) in the state -over 450 homes here with room for 22 more. We've not had a well-maintained park in at least two decades despite having no rent stability measures in place. It wasn't that there was not enough money for maintenance, but it was clear to see that the money went into other investments, mostly not in Maine. The rent increases were modest and in line with other parks in Maine and across the country, and there was a tentative code of honor in which tenants here lived in relative peace, unthreatened, and with customary considerations.

In fall of 2021 we were purchased by a private investment firm for the bargain basement price of \$8M. Despite the fact that we've paid more than \$8M in rent since the purchase, life has changed and not for the better. Rent increases of 46% from 2022 to January of 2025, with the last two annual increases being in the 12% range have severely rent-burdened 505 of the tenants. These increases were far more than the average increases across the country, higher than the rate of inflation or the increases in other consumer priced indices. We have no amenities. You'd think that we'd at least have storm drains that don't clog, a water system that doesn't siphon debris and gunk into some of our homes, and trees that don't spike through our roofs or windows or flatten decks and damage cars. You might even think that we'd have deep pavement holes filled and regular septic tank pumping...but no, not even those. And during multi-day power outages we have no water, no sanitation. Services decreased and communication became dictatorial, often manipulative or unresponsive regarding pet and sanitation rules. Suddenly the statutes for mobile home parks were interpreted in new and inventive ways - all to our disadvantage. All of these items create additional financial and time burden to tenants who are already maintaining their own homes.

The monthly rent for incoming tenants has doubled in three years. Often when a tenant tries to sell to get out from under large increases, they suddenly find that their buyer's rent will be hundreds more. Tenants deserve to know ahead of time what this landlord-created market change will be. We saw, for the first time ever, "Seller will subsidize buyer's rent." Some owners found that the company's lack of response to buyers regarding the applications delayed the sales and the lack of prepared leases delayed them even more.

They even unfairly competed with our home sales. We lived in a noisy, dusty construction zone while they added over 50 new homes at substantially less than market prices. But those homes are also contractually tied in. They can't be moved. Those tenants faced immediate higher than average increases in a year or less after

buying their new homes.

Over time, we reviewed articles we had seen regarding this type of MHC ownership, many regarding our owners. Quite disturbing was the new trend that this company also embraces - although they claim otherwise: Raise the rent, raise it again, find ways to levy fines and add fees, cut services (effectively raising rent again.) Lack of due diligence and skimping on maintenance creates costs for tenants, too, in higher rents and direct pass-throughs. Residents cannot possibly enjoy their homes or continue to effectively maintain their homes with that philosophy hanging over their heads every single day, especially when the tenants are "tenants at will" and rent can potentially be raised every month to collect fees not usually allowed -like a COUNTY ad valorem tax - no such thing here where we live. But they insist. Why does this concern us? In one park, they passed-through over \$900 in ad valorem taxes in one year.

I appeal to Maine-based MHP owners that have never done this to your tenants. This is why this type of legislation has become necessary. Some of your parks, not all, are wonderful. I've seen some of those parks! I know some of your tenants and they enjoy the peace you provide and you take pride in that. Honestly, I applaud you. (Others, not so much.) But there are new players in the state that don't have any connection at all with their tenants or what's simply right, or what peaceful enjoyment is. You may feel put out or punished by the suggestion of rent stabilization measures, but please consider that for each one of you (and you're not exactly defenseless) there are hundreds of defenseless families that are living in fear of losing their homes or never being able to move into "late mom and dad's" empty place because they don't qualified for the suddenly doubled rent. But then there's no one who wants to pay inflated rent or rent from a company whose reputation includes gouging and rough maintenance.

I take issue with the statement made by a Maine Representative who said that these investors are seeing below market rents and have some room for increases. I wonder if that person thought that "doubled rents" is a little room. Another park owner who sold property let his tenants know that each of the investors that made offers knew that they'd need to raise the rents \$200 in the first two years in order to make their numbers work. Is that about "Maine market?" or is that about creating a new market that is not for Mainers? How many mobile home park residents will suddenly make an extra \$200 a month this year?

LD 1723 is not a perfect solution. It does provide stability. It puts mobile home owners – and potential ones- back into the market instead of slaves to a contrived market. Let's take seriously the misnomer of the mobile home being mobile or that these homes, our largest financial assets, are not automatically rapidly-depreciating items in this market.

This is a step in stabilizing communities that need it. It's about ensuring that the more than 25% of MHP residents who are on disability or Social Security (and still working at age 75+) are not made homeless by rent gouging. It's also an opportunity to take a good, hard realistic look at this particular housing option while protecting mobile home park residents that are obviously being taken advantage of until there is a better solution - it's simply the right thing to do.

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Broken Bridge Tenant Union members