

Genesis

Connecting Communities to Capital

Testimony of Liza Fleming-Ives, on behalf of the Genesis Community Loan Fund

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs in conjunction with the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

In support of LD 210, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027" (Biennial Budget)

February 5, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Liza Fleming-Ives. I'm the executive director of the Genesis Community Loan Fund. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Genesis is a certified nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution—a CDFI—working throughout the State to bring funds and financing together to create solutions to the affordable housing crisis. We provide loans and expert guidance to support the development of new housing and the preservation of existing affordable homes.

Genesis and our partners across Maine communities are deeply grateful for the unprecedented investment that the state has made in recent years to support the development of new housing. Maine communities across the state are rising to the opportunity to use these funds to create much-needed homes.

Over the past two years alone, the Genesis team has helped developers, community groups, and municipalities in more than 100 communities create plans and get projects ready for financing. This activity is catalyzed by the new funding that the state has made available.

22 applications were recently submitted to MaineHousing's Rural Affordable Rental Housing program. They requested \$50 million to build new rental homes in rural communities all around the State. Unfortunately, that's twice as much demand as the funding that is currently available in the program.

Projects are being developed, and momentum is with us—and that underscores the need for continued investment from the state, which we hope the Legislature will support this session.

While new construction is essential, so is preserving existing affordable homes—and that includes in mobile home communities, which are a critical part of our affordable housing landscape.

Maine has over 460 mobile home communities, home to around 19,000 households. What's deeply concerning is that these communities are vulnerable to ownership changes that can bring about substantial rent increases and/or changes of use.

Maine lawmakers took an important step in 2023 requiring that owners of mobile home communities notify residents when they intend to sell, providing residents an opportunity to come together to purchase the land under their homes.

To further set residents up for success, the Legislature created another tool that's been essential: the Mobile Home Community Preservation Fund. This Fund is filling gaps, helping to make resident purchases possible and leveraging support from banks, community development lenders, and municipalities.

The Opportunity to Purchase law and the Mobile Home Community Preservation Fund show how dedicated legislative action can preserve affordable homes.

Last October residents of Blueberry Fields Cooperative in Brunswick worked together to purchase what is now the largest resident-owned mobile home community in Maine. They kept 278 homes in their community affordable.

Next week the residents of Cedar Falls Mobile Home Park in Bangor are preparing to do the same thing - to purchase their 129-home community with an opportunity to add over 70 additional new homes once they take ownership of the land.

Support from the Mobile Home Community Preservation Fund for these two communities is helping to preserve affordable housing for hundreds of households. It's proving to be a powerful tool for leveraging timely financing from community lenders and allowing residents to act quickly when opportunities arise. We're grateful for and urge you to support Part PP of the Governor's proposed budget that allocates \$3 million for the Mobile Home Community Preservation Fund.

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Thank you for your time today, and for your leadership in addressing Maine's housing crisis.

I welcome any questions you may have.