

Honorable committee members: My name is Pat Schwebler, and I am testifying in support of Governor Mill's extension of the emergency Mobile Home Park Preservation Fund for 3 million dollars. I work for the Cooperative Development Institute and am the Co program director of the New England Resident-Owned Community program.

CDI has had the honor of working with 11 Maine communities this past year and exploring the possibility of becoming resident owned. The Blueberry Fields cooperative became resident-owned in October of 2024. It would not have happened without the preservation fund. With the extraordinarily high price of Maine real estate combined with increased interest rates, this community would not have been able to acquire this property without assistance. 277 homes are now preserved forever, with space to add an additional 15 new homes. Almost 300 homes that contain many retired elderly, retired veterans, workforce housing, and young families.

We are currently in the process with another community in Bangor, ME, scheduled to close this month. It contains about 130 homes, and there is a plan to bring in about 30 more units in partnership with Bangor Housing. There is also a possibility of an additional 50 more units in the future.

We are in the early stages of organizing with two smaller communities: A 40-unit park in Lewiston and another 40-unit park in Monmouth, Maine. In total, we will have preserved almost 600 units of affordable housing since the preservation funds creation.

A priceless benefit of the work is helping residents become a community. Neighbors pull together as they must knock on doors and have conversations with neighbors they haven't met before. One of the joys in this work is observing that and having members relay stories of getting to know their neighbors, making new friends, and creating a social "in-person network" where new relationships are built. Neighbors begin to help each other through that connection.

The funding helps to create a soft landing on the rent increases for the community and provides a predictable multi-year plan that the community votes on. Out of state Wall Street companies and private equity players come into Maine with one goal: to make a profit for their shareholders. This often comes at the expense of stable rents, properly maintained infrastructure and quality resident services. These are not your mom-and-pop operators who take pride in ownership. A resident-owned community by comparison is motivated by affordability, sustainability, and the opportunity to create a true community.

With the report released last week stating Maine needed over 80,000 units of housing, the increasing real estate prices, the increasing interest rates, and the desire of Capital Equity to continue to invest and then gouge the residents with unsustainable rental increases, I respectfully ask that you support this fund in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for your time today and thank you for your service to the State of Maine.

Respectfully submitted

Pat Schwebler

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