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Testimony of Representative Cheryl Golek introducing

LD 1723, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Manufactured Housing Communities to Prevent Excessive Rent and Fee Increases

Before the Joint Standing Housing and Economic Development Committee

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, I am Cheryl Golek. I represent District 99, which includes Harpswell and part of Brunswick. Today, I am presenting **LD 1723, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Manufactured Housing Communities to Prevent Excessive Rent and Fee Increases**.

This act intends to protect mobile home park residents from rent gouging by limiting the rate of lot rent increases to slightly above-normal historical average increases, creating a review process for excessive rent increases overseen by the Manufactured Housing Board, and increasing tenant representation on the Manufactured Housing Board.

Maine has approximately 600 manufactured housing communities (MCHs),¹ also known as (mobile home parks). These communities have provided affordable housing for seniors and low- and moderate-income families for decades. Maine has more manufactured housing communities than any other New England state, making up about eight percent of our state's housing stock, housing approximately 45,000 Maine residents.

Mobile home parks are the last of Maine's naturally occurring affordable housing. This committee knows the resources needed to provide affordable housing at scale and how the millions we spend in public dollars to create affordable housing solutions are still insufficient to meet the need. We cannot afford to lose ground and must protect that public investment by also protecting existing affordable housing options.

Sadly, those days of consistent, reliable, affordable housing are over. Any day of the week, there's a headline about one facet of the housing crisis or another.

¹ <https://cdi.coop/de-stigmatizing-manufactured-housing-communities/>

This is a problem we need to tackle – now. After decades as a reliably inexpensive housing option, mobile home park communities have in the past decade become trendy cash cows for out-of-state corporate real estate investors, who have been quietly buying up these communities at a rapid pace.

A recent report presented² to the Housing and Economic Committee revealed that since fall 2023, 28 parks with 2,163 home lots for Maine families have gone up for sale. More than 1,100 have been or are expected to be purchased by out-of-state corporate entities. In addition to significant rent increases – not accompanied by significant investments that require rental increases- for-profit owners often charge exorbitant fees for additional storage, vehicles, pets, park maintenance fees, and more. These monthly fees and violations can add hundreds of additional dollars of charges per month.

In this room, we as a committee work hard to address our state housing³ shortage. We work hard to find and support solutions to keep people housed and provide eviction protection programs.⁴ This bill creates a practical preservation tool that aligns with all those things and more.

This act intends to protect mobile home park residents from rent gouging by limiting the rate of lot rent increases, creating a review process for excessive rent increases overseen by the Manufactured Housing Board⁵ and increasing tenant representation on the Manufactured Housing Board.

What makes this bill different from other housing assistance programs we have heard in this room and passed out of this committee? This bill will prevent people from being priced out and evicted from homes they own.

Most households in Maine MHCs qualify as low-income⁶, and many qualify as extremely low-income. Yet most people in MHCs own their own homes; many have invested everything in purchasing a home so they can retire and be comfortable. Some bought them as starter homes, and some have been handed from generation to generation. The owners of the homes in this park pay rent on the lots their homes sit on.

Because they own their homes and not the small piece of land their homes sit on, they are particularly vulnerable.

² <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://genesishfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FINAL-Maine-Mobile-Home-Community-Research-April-2025.pdf>

³ <https://mainehousing.org/news/news-detail/2025/02/05/mainehousing-releases-housing-outlook-report-for-2025>

⁴ <https://www.evictionprevention.mainehousing.org/>

⁵ <https://www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing/professions/manufactured-housing-board>

⁶ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://genesishfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FINAL-Maine-Mobile-Home-Community-Research-April-2025.pdf>

For decades, this has not been a problem in Maine. However, we are seeing a rapidly changing landscape as investor-owners seek to profit from the market imbalance created by the mixed ownership model of mobile home parks. Residents of these parks are not able to move and take their assets with them as traditional renters would. They are also not able to sell those assets because rising rents limit prospective buyers and lead to lower-than-market home value growth. The solutions I have offered in this proposal are practical tools to address the needs of mobile home park residents who are not able to buy their parks. We need a range of tools to meet our housing needs. It is my intention to work with each one of you to craft a proposal that creates a Maine-specific tool for this issue.

If we do not do something now, these affordable housing options will disappear.⁷ Many homeowners in these parks are one lot rent raise away from becoming unhoused. Thousands of residents in Maine mobile home park communities share similar stories of hardship caused by investor-owned purchases. We are talking about thousands of people who are already on the verge of losing a home. We must do something, and we must do something quickly because as we stand here today, someone's rent has become unaffordable, and they are being pushed from a home that they own.

In my district, I have one of the largest parks in the State, with more than 450 homes that house thousands of people. This park is owned by an out-of-state corporation that has rapidly increased the rent. The unreasonable rent increases and exorbitant fees have forced some of my constituents out of their homes; some have quietly left in the middle of the night, and others have signed their life savings investments over to the park owners because they are unable to sell or afford the rent.

These rent increases are not matched by investment in the property or increased services in the park. Mobile home park owners are not responsible for painting, cleaning carpets, or fixing windows; they have no toilets to fix appliances, furnaces, leaky roofs to mend, and all other maintenance expenses of traditional landlords. Mobile home park owners are typically only responsible up to where the home connects to utilities and the maintenance of the common areas.

Again, we are talking about thousands of people who are already on the verge of losing a home. The problem at hand is that we could lose the last of this naturally occurring affordable housing without a remedy. In that case, we are not protecting the millions we are spending on affordable housing because the loss of these homes will push us farther from our goal and cost Mainers more.

Today, I am presenting you with an answer to address the issue of rent gouging that is upending affordable home ownership and pushing homeowners to vacate homes they own. LD 1723 is

⁷ <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/23/maine-mobile-home-owners-are-pushing-back-against-private-investors/?auth0Authentication=true>

designed to bring rent fairness and end rent gouging to mobile homeowners who live in parks that charge lot rents.

This bill is designed with a balanced approach; it allows for reasonable increases to address increased costs and maintenance needs while protecting residents from extreme and ongoing rent and fee increases. It limits the lot rent and fees associated with tenancy in a manufactured housing community by no more than 10% combined within any four years.

This adjustment in rent increase allows a slightly above-normal historical average increase for lot rent in MHC's in our State, according to the Genesis fund report.

Setting rent stabilization policies to protect this specific, vulnerable population from predatory practices is not new. There are now 14 states that have adopted some protection for mobile home park residents from significant rent increases. One State (Oregon) imposes a fixed cap on rent⁸ increases, three states (Florida, Vermont, and Rhode Island) require a community owner to justify the reasonableness of a proposed rent increase to a neutral third party, and two states (Delaware and New York) have a hybrid system that imposes caps with a limited ability to justify higher rents. Seven states allow residents to sue to prevent a rent increase, defend against an action for eviction, or rent collection on the grounds that the increase is unconscionable. Washington, New Jersey, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania are considering adopting caps on rent increases in MHCs. Additionally, over 100 local communities have established rent stabilization policies. In Maine, Old Orchard Beach adopted a local MHC rent stabilization ordinance through a local referendum approved by 71% of voters.

At the same time, the bill allows the owner of a manufactured housing community to request an exemption. A manufactured housing community owner may request an exemption from the rent and fee increase limitations. By submitting a request to the manufactured Housing board and showing the need for an increase allows MHC owners the ability to raise rents when needed due to unforeseen events and park improvements.

"Efforts to improve the infrastructure for state oversight of MHCs⁹ make it more possible to understand trends and assess the vulnerability of parks. Vermont has established¹⁰ a robust division within its Commerce and Community Development Department that updates a Mobile Home Facts and Park Registry, including lot rents for new and existing tenants, occupancy rates, sales activity, planned sale announcements, and year-to-year trend data. Similarly, Colorado established a Mobile Home Park Oversight Program¹¹, which provides extensive online mobile home park information, including rent increases, parks sales, state policies, complaint procedures, annual reports, registration procedures, maps, and contact information."

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/us/oregon-rent-control.html>

⁹ <https://www.governing.com/urban/states-look-to-rein-in-rising-costs-for-mobile-home-owners>

¹⁰ <https://accd.vermont.gov/housing/mobile-home-parks/registry>

¹¹ <https://doh.colorado.gov/mobile-home-parks>

The bill increases the membership of the Manufactured Housing Board from 9 to 13 members so that the Manufactured Housing Board will have the needed resources to take on the added responsibilities. The bill also specifies that these rent limitations do not apply to resident-owned manufactured housing communities.

I have given you all a good snapshot of the need and how to achieve it. I want to cover some things I have heard: “This bill will affect mom-and-pop small park owners.” No, it really won't. Maine has some excellent landlords, and most of them are mom-and-pop owners. They take pride in how their parks look and the community they provide, and they don't price homeowners off their lots. They go out of their way to work with tenants. They are already doing the right thing.

The Genesis Fund report highlighted a prime example of this and how a change in ownership changes everything for tenants. At Mountain View Estates in Bowdoin, from 2001-2024, owners raised lot rents by a total of \$80, from \$265 to \$345, the equivalent of 1.5% a year. After Philips International bought Mountain View Estates in Bowdoin in June 2021, the lot rents increased by 53% from \$345 to \$525 monthly between 2021 and 2024. New residents entering the park are charged \$700 per month.

At Old Colony Village in Sanford, rents for existing residents increased gradually from \$250 to \$310 from 2009 to 2021, an increase of 2% per year. Since purchasing the communities, Phillips International has raised the rents on existing tenants from \$310 in 2021 to \$495 in 2024, representing an annual increase of 20%. Over that same time period, lot rents for new residents were raised from \$420 to \$800 to \$900.

This bill's rent increases are higher than mom-and-pop parks' average rent increases. This bill also offers landlords greater flexibility than other states, not limiting landlords to a small percentage increase each year, instead allowing them to increase rents more some years than others, depending on their needs.

Why the Manufactured Housing Board?

Maine's Manufactured Housing Board sits under the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation.¹² It was established to ensure that mobile homes are safe from hazardous defects, provide uniform performance standards for the construction and installation of mobile homes, and provide a safe and sanitary environment for occupants residing in mobile home communities. The Manufactured Housing Board, with a staff of four, provides licenses to the MHC owners following initial or renewal applications. They are also responsible for investigating complaints against its licensees and taking appropriate disciplinary action against noncompliance with its statutes and rules. The staff also inspect communities at least once every four years or at other times as necessary. We have a board that already exists and is familiar with

¹² <https://www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing/>

the existing MHCs in our State, so it makes sense that this would be the place for MHCs to request rent exemptions. It also aligns with best practices from other states to have entities familiar with the operation of mobile home parks involved in mediating rent increases rather than the courts or other entities.

This is not part of the description of what the MHC board does.

This is an added task, which is why the bill expands the board to 13 to create adequate oversight for the extra duty of reviewing and deciding MHC rent exemption waivers. I believe it is within the intent of the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation. I have attached the last three pages of the report recently given to this committee to show why I see it as a perfect fit for the MHB, which is under the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation.

The last page states:

The intent of occupational and professional licensure is to safeguard the public health, safety, and welfare. When designed and implemented appropriately, occupational licensure benefits consumers by assuring minimum competency to protect the public.

The challenge for policymakers is to find the correct balance of protecting public well-being without unduly restricting business and individual rights,

The bill before you fits nicely with the intent of the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation. By using an existing board, we do not have to recreate the wheel; we tweak it a bit, and the MHB operates on fees, so it could increase its fee a bit or add a fee for the exemption applications.

Will it be difficult for MHB to collect the data asked in this bill?

The data collection request could be added to the park licensing and re-licensing application, requiring the current applications to be edited to add the data requests. It is also important to note that the Office of Professional Occupational Regulation is working toward 100% online processing for efficiency and cost savings, and this is an issue that could be included in that work.

What happens if the parks raise higher rents without receiving an exemption?

That complaint could be filed with the attorney general office, where illegal complaints in MHC parks are already filed.

Why not leave these decisions to towns?

Towns can make these decisions, but sadly, most don't, not because they don't wish to and not because they don't know it is needed but because most towns do not have the resources to implement rent stabilizations in these parks and provide the necessary enforcement. Having towns review exemption requests would lead to a varied implementation across the state, rather

than uniform implementation. While Old Orchard Beech¹³ passed a rent control ordinance for a park in their town on November 5, 2024. Yet new move in rents have continued to grow, and the ordinance has not yet been fully implemented.

With 45,000 people living in manufactured home communities across the state, this issue demands a state-wide solution.

If we as a state don't do something now, these affordable housing options will disappear. Many homeowners in these parks are one lot rent raise away from joining the homeless ranks." Thousands of residents in Maine mobile home park communities share similar stories of hardship resulting from corporate investors' purchase of their communities. We are talking about thousands of people who are already on the verge of losing a home. We must do something, and we must do something quickly because as we stand here today, someone's lot rent has become unaffordable, and they are being pushed from a home that they own.

Thank you for your time and consideration I am looking forward to further discussions with all of you and working together on making this bill a reality for our constituents, our friends, neighbors, families, and state.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

¹³ <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/11/06/old-orchard-beach-voters-approve-mobile-home-rent-control-ordinance/>

PARK NAME	ADDRESS	DISTRICT	MEMBER
OLD ORCHARD VILLAGE	105 SMITHWHEEL RD	OLD ORCHARD BEACH, ME 04064-1063	Senate District 31 Senator Bailey
BLUE HAVEN MOBILE HOME PARK	885 PORTLAND RD	SACO, ME 04072-9663	Senate District 31 Senator Bailey
COUNTRY VILLAGE	1038 PORTLAND RD	SACO, ME 04072-9677	Senate District 31 Senator Bailey
PARKER FARM MOBILE HOME PARK	476 PARKER FARM RD	BUXTON, ME 04093-3345	Senate District 31 Senator Bailey
COACH FARM MOBILE PARK	KENERSON DRIVE	FRYEBURG, ME 04037	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
WILEYS MOBILE HOME PARK	WILEY DR OFF RT 113	FRYEBURG, ME 04037	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
ELM VILLAGE	206 ELM ST (CALLAHAN CIRCLE)	MECHANIC FALLS, ME 04256	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
MOTTRAM'S TRAILER PARK	WILLOW ST OFF NORTH ST	MECHANIC FALLS, ME 04256	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
MAPLE HILL ESTATES, LLC	DUNLAP AVE @ 228 ELM ST	MECHANIC FALLS, ME 04256-5303	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
R & J ESTATES	MICHAEL DRIVE OFF HAYDEN AVE	NORWAY, ME 04268	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
NORWAY COMMONS	99 TOWN AND COUNTRY DR	NORWAY, ME 04268-5548	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
SANBORN TRAILER COURT	19 GREENLEAF AVE	NORWAY, ME 04268-5947	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
COLDWATER BROOK	VARNEY LANE OFF COLDWATER BROOK RD	OXFORD, ME 04270	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
OXFORD PINES MOBILE HOME PARK	SKEETFELD RD	OXFORD, ME 04270	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
SPEEDWAY INC	SPEEDWAY LANE	OXFORD, ME 04270	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
ANDREWS TRAILER PARK	288 FORE ST	OXFORD, ME 04270-3304	Senate District 18 Senator Bennet
BELFAST TRAILER PARK	CHICKADEE, BLUEBIRD, AND CARDINAL CIRCLE	BELFAST, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
FAIRVIEW TRAILER PARK	MASON POND CIRCLE	BELFAST, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
HYLAND ESTATES	BACK RD	BELFAST, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
PIPER STREAM MOBILE HOME PARK	58 BACK BELMONT RD	BELFAST, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
SEACOAST VILLAGE	22 R.W. MACLEOD LN	BELFAST, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
BIRCHWOOD PARK	15 PINE RD	BELMONT, ME 04952-3120	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
WOOD'S LANE PARK	RTE 1 WOOD LANE	NORTHPORT, ME 04849	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
WITHEE ESTATES INC	MORGAN LN OFF MAIN ST (RT 131)	SEARSMONT, ME 04973	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
BAYSIDE TERRACE LLC	SEARSPORT TERRACE OFF ROUTE 1	SEARSPORT, ME 04974	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
SEARSPORT TERRACE TRAILER	SEARSPORT TERRACES OFF RT 1	SEARSPORT, ME 04974	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
SENNETT'S TRAILER PARK	OFF RTE 1	SEARSPORT, ME 04974-3407	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
SEARSPORT MOBILE HOME PARK	21 BACK SEARSPORT RD	SEARSPORT, ME 04974-3598	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
HOWARDS TRAILER PARK	CURTIS RD	SWANVILLE, ME 04915	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
HOWARD'S TRAILER PARK	27 RENEE DR	SWANVILLE, ME 04915-4599	Senate District 11 Senator Curry
COUNTRY ESTATES LLC	High St	NORTH BERWICK, ME 03906	House District 149 Representative Roberts
GRANITE VILLAGE	22 COMMODORE DRIVE	BIDDEFORD, ME 04005	House District 133 Representative Malon
HIDDEN HILLS	413 SOUTH ST	BIDDEFORD, ME 04005	House District 133 Representative Malon
FOREST PARK 154 WEST LLC	154 WEST ST	BIDDEFORD, ME 04005-9768	House District 133 Representative Malon
COASTLINE MOBILE HOME PARK	91 OLD BATH RD	BRUNSWICK, ME 04011-3523	House District 99 Representative Golek
BAY BRIDGE ESTATES	2 PRIMROSE LN	BRUNSWICK, ME 04011-9121	House District 99 Representative Golek
POND & POND	POND PARK RD OFF RT 11N	NAPLES, ME 04055	House District 84 Representative Walker
R & R VACATION HOME PARK	RTE 302N-FIRE LN 33	NAPLES, ME 04055	House District 84 Representative Walker
WEST SHORE ACRES	1 LAURIK LN	NAPLES, ME 04055-3015	House District 84 Representative Walker
CARRIAGE ESTATES MHP	1 CARRIAGE ESTATES	PITTSFIELD, ME 04967	House District 68 Representative Collamore
ENGELHARDT MOBILE HOME PARK	234-240 STINSON ST & CARDINAL ST	PITTSFIELD, ME 04967	House District 68 Representative Collamore
SUNSET MHP, LLC	HARRISON AVE	PITTSFIELD, ME 04967	House District 68 Representative Collamore
WINDWARD TERRACE	160 GREELEY ST	PITTSFIELD, ME 04967	House District 68 Representative Collamore
GROVE	POOLERS PARKWAY	WATERVILLE, ME 04901	House District 65 Representative Julia
COUNTRY MEADOWS MHC	457 W RIVER RD	WATERVILLE, ME 04901-4402	House District 65 Representative Julia
C AND N MOBILE HOME PARK	BARING ST AND SUMMER ST	CALAIS, ME 04619	House District 9 Representative Mingo
BOARDMAN STREET COMMUNITY	43 BOARDMAN ST	CALAIS, ME 04619-1003	House District 9 Representative Mingo
UNION PARK	205 UNION ST	CALAIS, ME 04619-1227	House District 9 Representative Mingo
GARFIELDS COURTS	100 GARFIELD ST	CALAIS, ME 04619-1551	House District 9 Representative Mingo