

May 2, 2025

Housing Committee

RE: LD1723 and LD1765 – Public Hearing

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Sandra Hinkley. I am the Owner of Maple Hill Estates, a manufactured home community in Mechanic Falls. I have owned this community for over 10 years, and my parents owned it for nearly 20 years before me. For decades, my family and I have supplied affordable housing to thousands of families. I am the President of MHAM (Manufactured Housing Association of Maine), and also a licensed Realtor for the past 18 years.

Our community is home to a variety of family dynamics, we have first time homebuyers, young families, empty nesters, and retirees all enjoying a peaceful way of life in our community.

LD1723 and 1765 are asking for a couple of changes to the way rent increases are done within manufactured home communities in Maine. I believe the idea behind both of these bills was to protect the affordability that our communities offer, as at this time in Maine we are in need of maintaining and expanding what affordable housing there is. However, I don't believe having a bill that spells out what amount a community owner is allowed to increase the rent is the right approach.

In my 10 years of ownership of my community, I have raised my lot rent very modestly, with my largest increase being \$40, my lowest being \$10, and some years no increase at all. In the last four years I have increased my rent 5%, 8% and 12%. In that time, I have experienced massive increases in my day-to-day operating costs. For example, my trash collection fees have increased 266% - yes, you heard me correct, trash collection is up over 266% in 10 years. In the last 4 years, trash collection is up 132%, Insurance on the community is up 41%, Real estate taxes have also increased 16%, and electricity has increased 50%. In addition, the cost for maintenance has increased as well for things such as plowing & sanding (80% in the last 4 years), tree trimming and removal, etc. In addition to our normal operating costs, we invest in community capital projects and we have repaved all the roads, replaced old street lights with new LED lighting, installed new

water meters, replaced old slabs on empty lots with new concrete slabs to allow for new homes, replaced electric meters as they age, and we are currently working on replacing old driveways with new pavement. The costs for concrete and asphalt have skyrocketed in the last few years as well. The list is long, and requires planning and reserves for capital projects in order to keep the community maintained to a level that my tenants expect, and that I feel proud to own. Limiting the rent increase amounts and frequency as proposed in these two bills would prohibit not only future capital projects, but would reduce my ability to maintain the property day to day to a level that keeps it a respectable and well-maintained community that so many enjoy calling home. If I was limited to increasing my rent 10% every 4 years as proposed in LD1723, or CPI plus 1% but not more than 5% per year as proposed in LD1765, you can see that those limitations would not allow me to cover the increases in my operating costs, never mind allow for saving for future capital projects. The communities in this state would start to fall into a state of disrepair. I am sure that is not the intention of the bill proposals, but that is the reality.

I believe the park owners know how to manage lot rent increases in order to operate their communities with pride, and to provide a safe and enjoyable living situation for their tenants. I do not believe an arbitrary limit on what an owner can increase their rent, or requiring the MHB or municipalities to manage or police a rent control ordinance, is going to get the result you desire. I believe a better use of resources would be to offer programs for assistance for those who truly need it like the elderly or veterans or disabled. If you limit the ability for a community owner to operate in a way that keeps their community safe and well maintained, it will be to the detriment of all tenants, and the State of Maine as well. There is more of a need to create programs to help those who need it. Let the community owners continue to operate their communities in the best way they can to maintain the integrity of the manufactured home community lifestyle.

My community has the ability to expand and add another 30 sites. That is 30 more affordable housing options for Mechanic Falls. I reached out to Maine State Housing to see if there were any programs or grants to help offset the costs of this expansion, which would cost over \$1,000,000. I was told that the affordable housing program grants specifically EXCLUDE leased land options. Maybe this is another area that could be looked at in order to expand affordable housing in Maine. I have many tenants in my community that used a first-time homebuyer loan from Maine Housing to purchase their home and place it on leased land in my community, but Maine Housing doesn't offer any programs to help expand the number of sites available for those buyers.

I would appreciate your vote of Ought NOT to Pass on this bill. I appreciate all the work you do on behalf of Mainers and look forward to working with you in the future. I would be happy to answer any questions and to be available for the work session.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sandra Hinkley

Maple Hill Estates / MHAM