

# Mobile Home Program

Po Box 1603, Burlington VT 05402  
802-660-3455 ext. 105



November 05, 2021

Dear Honorable Committee Chairs, Honorable Senators, and Honorable State Representatives:

My name is Sandrine Kibuey, Director of the Mobile Home Program (MHP) of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), which is Vermont's only statewide mobile home advocacy program. Primarily funded by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the MHP works not only to empower mobile home residents through community organizing and education, but also to protect and improve their housing rights and living conditions.

For the last two years, I have come to you to request an urgent and significant investment in mobile home parks that will prevent the certain loss of hundreds of "naturally" affordable homes in our rural communities and your constituents. This need is compounded by the pandemic and its continuous effects along with the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. An investment in mobile home parks and cooperatives is essential to ensuring resident health and wellbeing, immediate and long term housing sustainability of these communities, and the dignity of homeownership for thousands of vulnerable Vermonters.

The most urgent and continuously worsening challenge facing Vermont's mobile home communities are: infrastructure repair and maintenance, including water and sewer system replacement or upgrades, moving homes out of flood zones, road improvements, and repair or replacement of old, uninhabitable, abandoned mobile homes. There needs to be a significant investment in funds to address these issues. It is important that they have the upgrades and infrastructure to withstand climate change. We believe that immediate action – and continued action over the coming years – is required to address the crucial issues affecting the lives, health, safety and wellbeing of mobile home residents, who are important labor force in their communities, and to sustain affordable housing.

These infrastructure funding problems persist across park ownership types. For example, ANDCO Mobile Home Cooperative, a 7 lots small cooperatively owned park in Swanton VT, is currently teetering, on the edge of closure this winter as it does not have the upfront capital or sufficient access to funding for a water system repair costing over \$150,000. If this park faces an emergency closure this winter, about 20 Vermonters will become immediately homeless.

Over the past five months, the CVOEO MHP team conducted extensive canvassing efforts in parks throughout the northwestern and central regions of Vermont with the dual goal of better understanding resident concerns in the aftermath of COVID-19 while also informing residents about the current available support programs. We canvassed 21 parks made up of more than 1,100 households, completing 94 long form surveys, and directing many more to additional resources.

A high number of Vermont's mobile home residents are not in the financial position to make needed repairs on their individual homes, or absorb the cost of a high rent increase in their monthly budget. COVID-19 has deepened the gap quite substantially. As a result, individual repairs, made more expensive by pandemic conditions, are not prioritized in households with little flexible income. Furthermore, through our program hotline, we also hear from residents with serious and complicated infrastructure and habitability issues. They express concerns and fears related to expensive and/or life threatening situations in their home - ranging from a roof or floor caving in (repairs costing over \$ 5,000) to mobile homes removal (costing over \$10,000) - without having easy access to affordable financial support and/or other resources to resolve them.

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In addition, our program facilitates monthly meetings with over 20 of our state's non-profit park managers and cooperative boards to better understand the threats to the current stability of their homes.

These conversations, canvassing results, and a long-term analysis of trends has confirmed the most urgent and continuously worsening challenges facing Vermont's mobile home communities as listed at the beginning of this letter. So far, the unprecedented spending in housing seen in the past year has largely excluded mobile homes from crucial benefits such as home repairs funding or they are lumped them into existing housing groups without looking at their unique composition or specific needs. As a result, thousands of Vermonters must continue to accept substandard conditions in their homes and communities.

The negative impacts of aging infrastructure systems exceed those immediately related to park habitability; in fact, needed infrastructure repairs act as a significant barrier preventing the conversion from for-profit ownership to non-profit or cooperative models. Although these ownership models provide greater access to public resources and support, there is still significant shortfall between the money needed for repair and what is currently available or affordable.

We need to invest in our mobile home communities' future now through grant programs accessible not only to mobile home communities but also to individual households along with support systems, so that this critical form of affordable housing is actually preserved and strengthened.

Waiting for the opportunity to discuss this further, do not hesitate to contact me and/or the program with questions and or concerns by calling 802-660-3455 ext.105 or via email at [skibuey@cvoeo.org](mailto:skibuey@cvoeo.org).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kibuey', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Sandrine Kibuey, Director- MHP-Housing Advocacy Programs/CVOEO