

HB 1357 – Permitting manufactured homes by right in residential zones (9:30 am)

Position: Support with Amendment (OTPA)

Bill Summary: This bill permits newly built manufactured homes as of right on individual lots in all residential zones statewide and prohibits discriminatory zoning restrictions against them.

Key Points:

1. Zoning authority should address health, safety, and infrastructure—not aesthetic preferences
2. A three-bedroom, two-bath home is a three-bedroom, two-bath home regardless of where it was built
3. The bill affirms property rights and rejects irrational bias against manufactured housing
4. Concern: The bill's allowance for municipalities to adopt more permissible standards for manufactured housing undermines its parity premise
5. Land markets already perform a powerful sorting function; price signals, not zoning codes, determine where homes are placed

Full Testimony

Mr. Chair, members of the Committee—

My name is Christopher Freeman. I am a housing provider in Keene, Walpole, and Lebanon, NH and a founding advisory board member of the Monadnock Housing Collaborative. All views expressed today are my own.

I testified last year in favor of HB 685, which sought to establish by-right permission for manufactured housing in residential zones, and I am here today in support of HB 1357 for largely the same reason.

Many of the objections raised to this bill are aesthetic in nature. But aesthetic preference was never the purpose of zoning authority as delegated under RSA 674. That authority was intended to address legitimate concerns of health, safety, and infrastructure—not to enforce subjective judgments about form or taste.

Once you accept that distinction, it becomes clear why arguments about whether a home “looks right” are beside the point. I observed last year that if zoning codes can tolerate split-levels, they can tolerate ranches—wheeled or otherwise. Quips aside, the underlying point is serious: aesthetic discomfort does not constitute material harm.

At its core, this bill affirms a simple and defensible principle: a home should not be disfavored merely because it was built in a factory rather than assembled on site. A three-bedroom, two-bath home is a three-bedroom, two-bath home in all the ways that should matter under the law. Its impact on water, sewer, roads, and the health and safety of its neighbors does not change based on where the framing occurred. If a municipality has already determined that a residential lot can support a single-family dwelling, then selectively raising objections when the structure arrives on a truck is not planning—it is an arbitrary infringement of an owner’s right to make shelter on their land.

Manufactured housing is dignified housing. It is safe, durable, and legitimate. I support this bill because it affirms real property rights and rejects an irrational bias that has been baked into zoning codes for decades.

That said, I want to be clear-eyed about what this bill does—and what it does not do.

Despite its many positive attributes, manufactured housing is not the American Dream people were priced out of. It is what remains after we taxed and regulated the freedom to *make* one’s own shelter to the margins. This bill meaningfully expands access to ownership, but it does so by opening a pressure relief valve rather than dismantling the structural constraints that made it necessary. That does not make the bill wrong—it makes it necessary, but insufficient.

I also want to raise one specific concern—not as opposition, but as a request for internal consistency.

The bill’s central premise is parity: that manufactured housing is entitled to equal treatment with site-built housing in residential zones. Whether one views that parity as a reflection of true equivalence or as a principled rule adopted to prevent arbitrary application of the law, it is the organizing logic of the bill. However, the language allowing municipalities to adopt *more* permissible standards for this type of housing undermines that very premise.

Parity should mean sameness. If municipalities wish to liberalize lot sizes, frontage, or dimensional controls, they should do so **across the board**, rather than creating a separate regulatory category for manufactured homes. Otherwise, we risk reintroducing distinction where the bill correctly sought to eliminate it—and in doing so, weakening both the legal and moral foundation of the reform.

Finally, for those concerned about manufactured homes appearing where they do not “belong,” it’s worth remembering that land markets already perform a powerful sorting function. Very few people are going to purchase a \$500,000 lot to place a \$120,000 home

on it. Price signals, not zoning codes, do most of this work naturally. This bill does nothing to alter self-selection in an active marketplace— it simply affirms that taste is a private matter on one’s own land, and that there is no coherent moral basis for allowing a municipal body’s aesthetic preferences to override an owner’s discretion over the form of their shelter where no health or safety risk is shown.

I support HB 1357 because it affirms property rights and rejects irrational discrimination. But we should be honest with ourselves about what it represents. This bill expands freedom at the margins, but the larger task of restoring people’s *opportunity* to make a truly personal home free from crushing structural constraints still lies ahead.

Thank you for your time, and I’m happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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