



Captive Consumers

Why Manufactured-home Owners Need Legislation to Level the Playing Field

By Anne Anderson, GSMOL State President

If you go into a store, and you don't like the prices, or the quality of the merchandise, or the service, you can walk out and go to a different store.

If you live in a manufactured-home (MH) park, and you don't like the prices (astronomical space rent!) or the quality of the merchandise (deteriorating condition of the park!) or the service (abusive manager!) you can NOT easily leave and go to another mobilehome park.

Gone are the days when you could hitch your Airstream to the back of your car and drive away to another park where there were plenty of spaces available for a new resident, like my grandmother could do in the 1950's. Nowadays, even if you do live in an Airstream, or a motorhome, or a house trailer, it is most likely no longer movable. Larger homes that come apart in two or more pieces cannot be rehhabited in another location (likelihood of structural damage). And there is no other location, anyway. Even if there were to be an empty space in a MH park (unlikely!), the management wouldn't allow anything but a brand-new home to be put on it.

So homeowners in MH parks are captive consumers. "If you don't like it here, you can leave" doesn't work for us.

If you are a MH owner, you already know all this - ***but there are other people who need to know this as well*** – your City Council or County Board of Supervisors, the local news reporters, the attorneys and legal aid organizations in your area, and the public! And maybe you can help to tell them, and even make a difference in fixing the problem.

As we know, since MH owners are captive consumers, and the people owning the parks have money to burn while most homeowners are low income, **the playing field between homeowners and property owners is not a level one.** The park owners hold all the cards. This is why it is important for protective legislation to be enacted, either at the state level or in your city or county jurisdiction.

There are three kinds of MH ordinances that every city and county should have:

RENT STABILIZATION ORDINANCE – protects homeowners from unreasonable rent increases while providing a fair rate of return for the park owner. For more information about RSOs, see the **Rent Stabilization** section on our website <https://gsmol.org>, which includes an article spelling out the components of a typical RSO and a chart of all the RSOs in the state (with links to them).

SENIOR MHP ZONING OVERLAY – prevents the MHPs designated as senior parks (55 and older) from being converted to all-ages against the will of the residents. It is best to have a balance between senior and all-ages parks in any area, but the park owners usually favor all-ages, probably because seniors are usually on fixed incomes.

MHP CLOSURE/CONVERSION ORDINANCE – requires a park owner who plans to close the park or convert the land to another use to (1) provide an Impact Report showing the effect of closing the park on the supply of affordable housing in the area, which might cause the city or county to reject the application, and (2) create a relocation plan to pay every resident the in-place market value for their home if it cannot be relocated into a comparable MHP within a certain radius of miles. Since finding an open space in *any* MHP is going to be a problem, the park owner will almost surely be faced with paying for all the residents' homes, and might decide not to close or convert the park after all.

OR MHP ZONING – this establishes each MHP to be in a special zone that prevents the land from being converted into another use, period.

What Homeowners Can Do to Help Level the Playing Field

1. **Know the law.** There are resources you can find on the GSMOL website, including the **MRL Handbook**, our **Know Your MH Rights** page which has

articles by our attorney Bruce Stanton and other experts, and a **Mobilehome Q & A** feature that lets you test your knowledge. You can also visit the **Ed Fund Academy**, created by one of our associated nonprofits, which has “courses” on the MRL, HCD’s Codes & Standards, and Bruce Stanton’s Rent Stabilization Ordinance Manual, in which the subject is split up into small “bites” for easy learning. *See the end of this article for links to these, and please download whatever you can and print it out for your fellow residents who are not online.*

2. **Band together.** GSMOL members can form a **GSMOL Chapter** in their park. Chapters and members in the same jurisdiction can **team up together** with the help of a GSMOL leader.
3. **Get your story out.** Talk to the local reporters. Write to the columnists who typically sound off about injustice. If there is nothing really bad going on in your park at this time, at least tell them about how homeowners in a mobilehome park are captive consumers. Encourage your fellow residents to attend meetings of your city or county government and speak out during the Public Comment period.

Information and Help

- **Contact a GSMOL Leader:** www.gsmol.org/contact
- **Know Your MH Rights (Articles by the Experts):** www.gsmol.org/know-your-mh-rights
- **MRL Handbook:** on www.gsmol.org, look under **Resources** tab
- **HCD’s Codes & Standards:** <https://www.gsmol.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/title-25-chapter-2-20130401.pdf>
- **Ed Fund Academy (“courses” on the MRL, HCD Codes & Standards, and Bruce Stanton’s Rent Stabilization Ordinance Manual):** www.edfundacademy.blogspot.com
- **Mobilehome Q & A:** www.gsmol.org/knowledge-base/
- **Why Form a GSMOL Chapter in your Park? And How to Do it:** www.gsmol.org/gsmol-chapters-and-how-to-grow-one/