

# Manufactured homeowners live at risk of eviction – state policies can improve housing insecurity or make it worse.



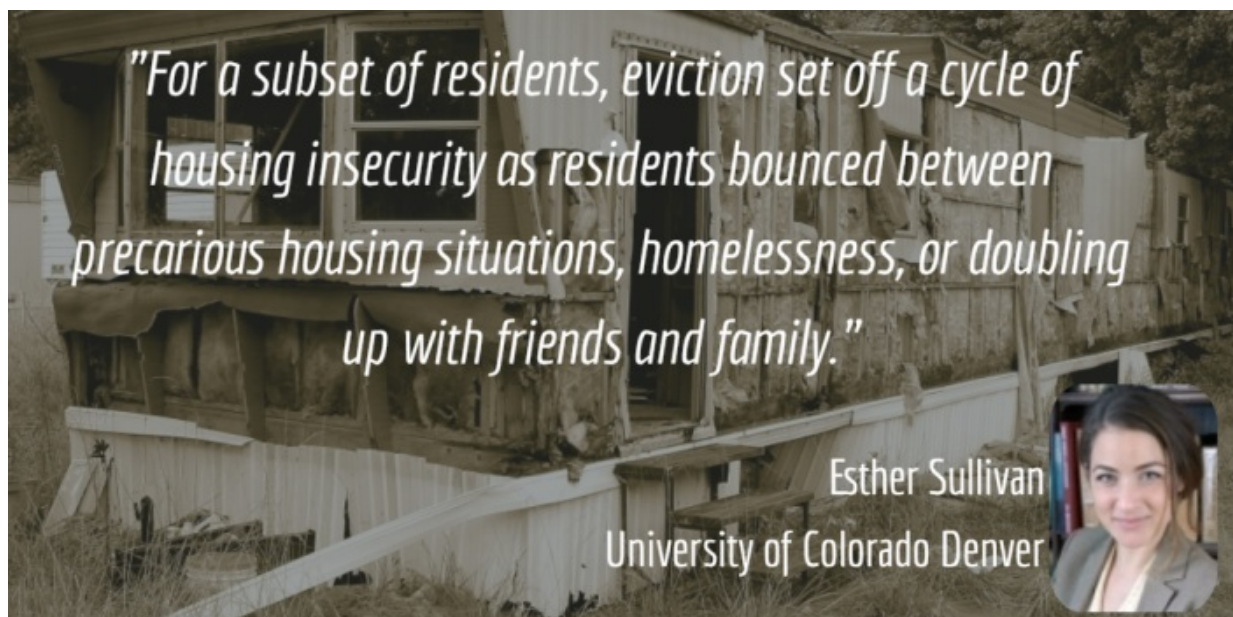
*High rents and house prices across America means that mobile homes are playing an increasing role in providing housing in the US. Mobile homes placed in mobile home parks can be precarious, with the potential for closure at any time, displacing hundreds of residents. [Esther Sullivan](#) spent two years conducting ethnographic analyses of mobile home parks in Florida and Texas, two states with very different policies for managing displaced residents. She found that Florida's more generous, but privately run, regime actually made it more difficult for the displaced to relocate, while in Texas, residents were able to resettle much more quickly, albeit after using up more of their own resources.*

At a time when 1) the cost of entry-level homes is once again rising in most US metro areas and 2) an individual working full time for minimum wage [cannot afford rent](#) for a fair-market one bedroom unit in any US state, the mobile home is filling the gap between housing needs and housing opportunities for about [8.4 million US households](#). In fact, manufactured housing – more often called mobile homes or trailers – is the country's single [largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing](#).

Mobile homes often provide the only access to the American Dream of homeownership for low-income households. In 2011, [they accounted for](#) 30 percent of all new homes sold under \$200,000, 50 percent of all new homes sold under \$150,000, and 71 percent of all new homes sold under \$125,000.

About one third of mobile homes are located in mobile home parks, where residents own their homes but rent the land under their homes. While 80 percent of mobile home park residents own their homes [only 14 percent](#) of these residents also own the land beneath their homes. This divided land tenure is part of what makes housing in mobile home parks so affordable, but it also makes mobile home parks some of the most insecure communities in the US.

Mobile home parks can, and often do, close at any time and legally evict residents. The vast majority of these residents own their homes and they are forced to move them at their own expense. Over the last four decades, mobile homes have become virtually immobile. They are intended to be transported once – from the factory to the site. Moving these homes costs up to \$15,000 and can result in serious structural damage as well as lost value in the home.



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In both states, I lived inside closing parks and followed residents before, during, and after they were evicted. In total, I had close daily involvement with about 180 residents in the two closing parks where I lived and in 32 surrounding potentially closing parks in both states. To focus on the processes through which mobile home park residents evictions were managed I also shadowed, worked beside, and hauled homes with 12 mobile home movers, installers, and owners of moving companies in both states.

My findings show that in both Florida and Texas, mobile home park closures negatively impacted the living conditions of already impoverished residents. In both states eviction resulted in poorer quality housing alongside additional housing cost burdens after residents moved out of closing parks. For a subset of residents, eviction set off a cycle of housing insecurity as residents bounced between precarious housing situations, homelessness, or doubling up with friends and family.

Moreover, I found that the negative effects of eviction were more complicated and prolonged under Florida's state regulatory regime, which was paradoxically organized to ameliorate the effects of eviction. While residents in Texas drained entire savings, cut off remittances to family members abroad, and used precious funds from the Earned Income Tax Credit to arrange the relocation of their homes, they were able to exert control over the process. As the sole financier of their moves they were able to dictate the terms and timing of their eviction process. Meanwhile in Florida, the voucherized system of relocation aid created a series of public-private partnerships between the state agency that administers relocation funds and a collection of private moving companies and corporate park communities (where homes were relocated). As the recipient of state funds, moving companies had significant power to dictate the terms and timing of residents' moves. Florida residents experienced a prolonged and disorienting relocation process that extended for several months (in some cases one year) while Texas residents were able to resettle in their homes in new communities within weeks of a park closure.

Residents in both states would benefit from policy changes in three key areas:

**Establishing a minimum six-month eviction notice and directing residents to state-managed relocation support:** State regulation of mobile home park closures has been highly effective in states such as Oregon, which recently passed [legislation](#) requiring a 365-day eviction notice and relocation fees of \$5,000, \$7,000, or \$9,000 (for an abandoned home, a singlewide, and a doublewide, respectively) paid *directly* to tenants.

**Implementing a mandatory and streamlined inspections process:** The cursory post-relocation inspection process in Texas resulted in structural damage and faulty installations, while the lengthy inspection process in Florida greatly extended residents' dislocation and did not ensure high-quality installations. [Proper installation](#) is essential to the continued life of a mobile home and should be a key area of regulation around mobile home park closures

**Regulating the marketplace in mobile home relocation aid:** Florida's relocation aid relied heavily on the private sector to convey state-mandated protections, but a lack of oversight allowed private providers to create timelines and conduct practices that maximized profits while extending the trauma of evicted residents. While in Texas a lack of oversight meant residents did not receive their legally entitled eviction notice period; all residents were evicted with 30 days' notices, though state laws require (but do not enforce) a 60 days' notice policy. State oversight of existing laws and regulation of for-profit markets in relocation services are essential to ensure equitable relocation procedures.

**Promoting legislation to support resident owned communities:** The most powerful policy prescription should target the source of mobile home park residents' housing insecurity rather than its consequence, eviction. Policies that focus only on relocating residents from land-lease park to land-lease parks offer only a band aid solution. Such policies do not target the cause of residents' housing insecurity and do not sufficiently address [the known negative consequences of eviction](#). Nonprofits such as R.O.C. (Resident Owned Communities) USA, assist residents of closing mobile home parks with collectively purchasing and convert park properties from private ownership to collective ownership, thus guarantee that the lands cannot be sold out from under residents. In July 2017, Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) introduced the [Frank Adelman Manufactured Housing Community Sustainability Act \(H.R. 3296\)](#) to provide a tax credit for property owners to sell park properties to residents or nonprofits. Such legislation would target the root of housing insecurity found in mobile home parks and address the negative impacts of mass eviction documented in this study.

- *This article is based on the paper '[Displaced in Place Manufactured Housing, Mass Eviction, and the Paradox of State Intervention](#)' in American Sociological Review.*

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author



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Esther Sullivan is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado Denver. Her research focuses on poverty, spatial inequality, legal regulation, housing, and the built environment, with a special interest in both forced and voluntary residential mobility. Her research uses ethnographic methods and geospatial (GIS) analysis.