

TESTIMONY ON

HB 5008, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTARY ADOPTION BY MUNICIPALITIES

via email to ettestimony@cga.ct.gov

By: Sara C. Bronin, Esq., AIA
sara.bronin@gmail.com | 860-840-1408

March 3, 2020

Chairman Needleman, Chairman Arconti, and the Honorable Members of the Energy & Technology Committee:

I am writing in strong support of HB 5008, which would enable cities and towns across the state to choose green, high-performance standards for their buildings.

By way of brief background, I am a tenured law professor at UConn Law School, and I serve as the faculty director for the Center for Energy and Environmental Law. I also serve as the Chair of the Board of the City of Hartford Energy Improvement District (EID), which was created in 2017 pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 32-80a et seq, and the Chair of the Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission. I am also an active member of the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association, the CT Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (as a licensed architect, familiar with building codes), and the CT Bar Association.

Through all of these academic, public service, and professional roles, I have come to see the upgrading of building codes statewide as absolutely essential to ensuring that Connecticut remains a leader in forging a more sustainable future. This bill is a start in the right direction.

In Hartford's draft City Plan, online at www.hartford2035.org, the revision of building codes to enable greener buildings is one of our top sustainability priorities. We in Hartford recognize how stronger building codes can bring long-term health benefits to our residents, including reducing asthma rates.

Stronger buildings codes can also reduce energy costs for our families over the long term. Through its 2018 Climate Action Plan and the Energy Improvement District, Hartford is deeply invested in ensuring all residents have access to cleaner, cheaper power. Many of our families spend one-third of their incomes on electricity bills. If we required our buildings to be built more soundly, we think that we would be able to reduce the disproportionately high energy burden on our residents, and make their homes more comfortable year-round.

We in Hartford also recognize the urgency of climate change, the burdens of which fall on low-income people and people of color. If we don't start making our buildings more energy efficient and greener, it's Hartford residents who will suffer most. In our relatively low-income city – a city with the highest percentage of affordable housing in the state – we see a greener building code as a matter of environmental justice.

By directing DEEP to develop a stretch energy code that improves energy efficiency more than base code, HB 5008 offers communities across the state an opportunity to ensure that new development is on track to meet critical greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2050, and most importantly, protect residents from high utility bills in the near future. In passing this legislation, we would also be aligning with New York State, whose “Stretch Code” provides energy savings of 11% over the state’s base code. Over time, this represents an enormous cost savings with very real implications for struggling households like those in Hartford.

On behalf of the City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission and Energy Improvement District Board, I strongly urge you to support this bill to improve the standards of our building stock across Hartford and across the state.

Thank you for providing the public with the opportunity to comment on this important proposal.