



OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

Testimony of Erin Boggs, Esq.
before the Housing Committee

March 15, 2021

**Written Testimony regarding H.B. 6611,
An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Other Policies Regarding
Affordable Housing and Development**

Thank you to the leadership and members of the Planning and Development Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Erin Boggs and I am the Executive Director of Open Communities Alliance (OCA), a civil rights non-profit organization that promotes equitable access to housing across Connecticut.

I write to support H.B. 6611, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Other Policies Regarding Affordable Housing and Development. This proposal, modeled on an effective system in New Jersey, asks every town in Connecticut to plan and zone for its fair share of affordable housing. The fair share approach to planning and zoning is the right thing to do to address a range of social justice issues in Connecticut. It is also the smart thing to do to boost our economy and put our state on a more sustainable path.

Fair Share Planning and Zoning is the right thing to do because it addresses poverty concentration and empowers individual housing choice. Critically, zoning reform in wealthy communities will decrease housing pressure on urban communities most at risk of gentrification and displacement. Further, it helps both the children currently attending and those who would be joining our disproportionately white schools by fostering the cultural competency that is essential to success in the more diverse workforces of the future. By asking each town to take on a fair portion of the need for affordable housing in a way that is sustainable, municipalities can embrace and adopt better, more equitable planning, knowing that their neighbors are doing the same.

Fair Share Zoning is the smart thing to do because it will have a tremendous impact on our state's economy. We've learned a lot from New Jersey's experience with its law, which has been honed through trial and error over the past 50 years, to emerge as a system on the path to generate 100,000 units of affordable housing. The same kind of production in Connecticut plus additional market rate units developed through inclusionary zoning, would likely yield \$60 billion of income for Connecticut residents and \$12 billion in state and local tax revenue and produce 80,000 jobs over ten years. More than that, it

would set Connecticut up to be a great place to live for generations to come by providing affordable housing options, attracting employers to relocate closer to a burgeoning workforce, and staunching decades of painful outmigration.

Here is how fair share works. Very simply, the fair share approach generates an estimate of the need for affordable housing and then allocates it fairly to regions, then towns based on per capita median income, town wealth (in the form of its grand list), multifamily housing percentage, and poverty rate. Towns with greater means and less of a track record of contributing to a solution are asked to do more. Towns with high rates of poverty (20% or greater) are excluded.

Towns are then asked to plan and zone to achieve their fair share allocation in 10 years. Towns can ask a court to certify their plan and gain a safe harbor and, if need be for infrastructure or natural resource protection reasons, get an adjustment to their allocations. Towns can also simply file their plan with the state knowing it could be challenged but they will be in great shape if they have solid plan. Towns that do not make a plan are subject to certain enforcement provisions.

This is the right thing to do because in one fell swoop it allows Connecticut to address its affordable housing and housing segregation crises, while ensuring that towns remain in the planning and zoning driver's seat. In one of the most housing-cost-burdened and segregated states in the nation, addressing these twin crises is critical to do simply as a matter of social justice, but also as a matter of putting all of Connecticut's kids in a position where they can contribute to the culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse future of our state.

For further information, I offer the following resources:

- *A Steady Habit of Segregation: The Origins and Continuing Harm of Separate and Unequal Housing and Public Schools in Metropolitan Hartford, CT*, Susan Eaton (2020): https://www.ctoca.org/steady_habit_of_segregation
- *Out of Balance: Subsidized Housing, Segregation and Opportunity in Connecticut*, Erin Boggs and Lisa Dabrowski (2017): <https://www.ctoca.org/outofbalance>
- *A Fair Share Housing Model for Connecticut*, David Kinsey, PhD, FAICP & OCA (2020): <https://www.ctoca.org/fairshare>