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TESTIMONY ON SB 1024  
An Act Concerning Zoning Authority*

*March 12, 2021*

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

On behalf of the Connecticut Hispanic Democratic Caucus, I am proud to testify in strong support of SB 1024, an act that will transform our outdated system of zoning regulations. Decades upon decades of zoning discrimination have brought us to the point where bills like SB 1024 are necessary, and it is the moral responsibility of CT's state legislature to move swiftly in order to address this issue.

Housing discrimination is one of the many reasons why our state is segregated. It is no accident that West Hartford is primarily white, while Bloomfield is predominantly black. In the seventies, a Hartford-based civil rights group conducted an experiment where volunteers pretended to be prospective homebuyers in meetings with realtors. Black and Latino volunteers were overwhelmingly referred to neighborhoods in Hartford or Bloomfield while white volunteers were directed to areas like Simsbury, Avon, and West Hartford. As a result, many top Connecticut real estate firms were sued on the basis of violations of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Decades later, we are grappling with the residual effects of this blatant discrimination. In order to desegregate our state, we need to increase affordability so that our communities can become more diverse.

House Majority Leader Jason Rojas has pointed out that segregation is one of the many reasons that the United States is so divided. "Our kids don't go to school together," he once said, "we don't eat at the same restaurants." If we maintain this course, we are going to remain divided and ignorant of what a Connecticut that embraces multiculturalism and diversity in every corner could look like.

Existing zoning regulations also prevent the Latino community from generating wealth. Home ownership has been the primary vehicle of wealth creation in America for centuries, and it simply has not been accessible to minority communities because of redlining and other racist housing practices. With housing costs as high as they are, many members of our community are unable to reap the benefits of home ownership. SB 1024 will increase affordability for the Latino community and by fully legalizing accessory dwelling units, unlock a new vehicle of wealth creation.

Passing this bill is a moral imperative. We are increasingly seeing bipartisan acknowledgement of the structural inequities that have been endured by the Latino community for decades upon decades. As a result, we hope to see a bipartisan embrace of solutions like SB 1024 that fight against systemic racism in Connecticut. It is unacceptable that in the 21st century, we live in a state where the zip code you come from determines your life expectancy and the quality of government services that you receive. Zoning reform is a step in the right direction to make Connecticut a more inclusive collection of communities.

Thank you very for entertaining my testimony

*Frank Alvarado*

Frank Alvarado

Treasurer

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