

*To:* CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

*From:* Kathryn Blanco, Danbury

*Re:* SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

*Date:* March 13, 2021

Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

Growing up in Newtown, CT, I spent a lot of time outdoors in my yard, surrounded by forested hills. I appreciated my time outdoors and wanted to protect the wildlife around me. But as someone who received my driver's license late in high school and still does not own my own car, living so far from the center of town was also a bit isolating. When I came to DC for college, I missed the trees and hills from home but loved being able to walk or take public transportation to run errands, meet up with friends, and even explore public parks. I never considered moving back to Connecticut because I never thought of it as a place for young people. Housing is expensive, rentals are hard to find in towns like Newtown, and cars are a necessity in many areas. When I was sent home from school because of the coronavirus, I began taking long walks around my family's neighborhood. Shortly before my family moved to Danbury, I found I had been living within walking distance of a public park and trail almost my whole life and had never noticed! I didn't need my family's large (water-guzzling) lawn to have access to nature – it was all around me, including on public land I had never appreciated.

I began to see that higher-density development and access to nature don't have to be oppositional goals. Adding multifamily homes near business centers and train stations would make it easier for people to enjoy all the benefits of small-town Connecticut life without the drawbacks of isolation and wasted time and energy on commutes. Increasing housing supply, particularly of smaller units, would also make homes more affordable, and decreasing sprawl would actually help to preserve the natural lands that bring so much joy and peace to CT residents. Zoning reform could also make this life accessible to more people – not just young (soon-to-be) graduates like myself who are deciding whether or not to return, but

also to senior citizens with limited mobility, to lower-income people, and to people of color. I want zoning reform because it saddens me to see my state wasting its ample potential by clinging to a rigid, outdated model of suburbia that no longer serves almost anyone. I want my state to become a place I want to come back to, and I will help advocate for that change.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Blanco