

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Thomas Broderick, Trumbull

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

Date: March 15, 2021

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

I am writing this in support of “SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems.” Expanding the amount and diversity of housing in all of our communities—and not just “affordable housing”—will build a growing and dynamic economy, expand home ownership, increase property owner’s rights, promote environmentally-friendly development, construct walkable communities and reduce racial and socioeconomic segregation. All of these are compelling reasons to pass SB 1024. However, as an educator I feel uniquely qualified to discuss one key reason to support zoning reform: to fulfill the legacy of *Sheff v. O’Neill* and provide equal opportunities to all of our children and families.

*Sheff v. O’Neill* was an education case that was really about housing. The lawsuit asserted that segregation in the Hartford-area public schools led urban students to receive a worse education than their suburban peers. The Connecticut Supreme Court agreed and in 1996 ruled that Hartford’s students were racially, ethnically and economically isolated. Importantly, the justices acknowledged that “the state has not intentionally segregated racial and ethnic minorities.” Instead, the state inadvertently promoted school segregation because a 1909 law established “town boundaries as the dividing line between all school districts in the state.” In other words, schools in Connecticut are segregated by class and by race because towns in Connecticut are segregated by class and race. The root issue was housing, not education.

It’s hard to overstate how much exclusionary zoning laws work to produce the outcomes seen in *Sheff v. O’Neill*. Expensive housing in Connecticut locks lower and middle class students of every race and ethnicity out of opportunity-rich towns and top school districts. Harvard University’s Raj Chetty and his colleagues at the *Opportunity Insights* found that “neighborhoods in which children grow up shape children’s outcomes in adulthood” and concluded that “low-income families are segregated into lower-opportunity areas.” Having enough money to purchase an expensive single family home on a large lot should not be a prerequisite for your children gaining access to a quality education. Fortunately, building more multifamily housing and expanding access to high-quality schools is not a zero-sum game.

Opponents of the bill argue in favor of local control or “home rule,” claiming that localities know how to handle their housing. Unfortunately, this is the very system producing too little housing and opportunity for our state’s families. The specter of the 1960s urban renewal hangs over state-level changes, but the proposals in SB 1024 are not urban renewal part II: ADU’s, housing near main streets, and by-right construction next to train stations are generative policies, not destructive ones. I empathize with property owners who never want their

neighborhoods to change, but local control over housing has Connecticut caught in a vice: unattainable housing prices, high property taxes, and a growing budget but shrinking population. Only state-level, structural reforms can address these dynamics.

I live in Trumbull and teach in Ridgefield—two high-opportunity communities. I see how growing up in an affluent community benefits my students and town's residents, and I want the same for every family and child in the state. I also want my town to become a more vibrant place with a walkable downtown, thriving business district and a diverse set of residents of all ages, races, and ethnicities. Fortunately, we can accomplish all of this. Please fulfill the legacy of *Sheff v. O'Neill* and support SB 1024. With the committee's leadership, we really can build a better state.