

3/14/2021

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: **Mariette Brown, Old Saybrook, CT**

Re: **SB 1024**, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, etc...

Dear Members of the Committee:

I currently live in Old Saybrook, but before this lived many years in Old Lyme. I was involved in refugee resettlement work during that time. Unfortunately, the work was complicated by the lack of affordable housing in Old Lyme. We found housing in Waterford, New London, and East Lyme.

There is current work in the town with two refugee families, both of which have school aged children and have benefitted immensely by the school system there. The town welcomed them, and everyone benefitted from the expanded perspective both these families brought to their classmates.

One young Iraqi woman produced a musical / dramatic piece *with* her class, (not *for* it...) illustrating her life before and during the war, and their flight from Hommes. Her classmates were enthusiastic and stunned by her work, her experience, and the piece.

There is another family, a Congolese family, also with high school and elementary school aged children. One has graduated from Old Lyme High School, and is exploring college. I am sad to report that they must relocate to a neighboring town, because they can not find a place to live on their income(s). The town will be impoverished by this.

Racism and xenophobia stem from ignorance. If you know another's story, you can be compassionate. If you only see the color of their skin or hear their accent without the back story, assumptions can take root. Negative stereotypes can grow, and dislike become entrenched. To fight these things we need to really *know* each other more. We can't do that from the next town over. We have to know them as classmates, co-workers, students, neighbors. Providing for affordable housing is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your time.

Mariette Brown