



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Planning and Development Committee Public Hearing –March 15, 2021

CHRO Testimony Regarding:

SB 1024 – AAC Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

HB 6611 – AAC a Needs Assessment and Other Policies Regarding Affordable Housing and Development

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities has a long history of being part of the fight to end segregated housing in Connecticut. As the state's enforcement agency for fair housing laws, we routinely investigate and prosecute individual cases of discrimination based on race, color, national origin and ancestry, as well as discrimination against families because they include children. That discrimination takes the form of not only being denied a unit but being denied an entire neighborhood or town, just because of the color of your skin or the place where you were born. The challenge we face is access to safe, affordable housing for all, wherever that person wants to live without the constant struggle of discrimination. That challenge is a monumental one given the local zoning control afforded all of the cities and towns in Connecticut and given the history of discriminatory housing laws, exclusionary zoning, redlining and restrictive covenants. The state needs to pass comprehensive reform to the zoning laws in order to address the incredible segregation in housing that exists today. The Commission supports HB 6611 and SB 1024 which endeavor to create new requirements for affordable housing and other supports to start the process of dismantling segregated housing in Connecticut.

The Commission supports all of the concepts in SB 1024 and in particular Section 9 which requires not less than two hours of affordable and fair housing policy training. When the Commission conducts investigations in zoning discrimination cases, we often find that officials have little or no fair housing training, yet they are making decisions that require good working knowledge of fair housing law. The Commission currently provides free fair housing training on a quarterly basis and is interested in working with the legislature to implement this part of the statute.

The Commission also supports all of the concepts in HB 4762 which takes a different approach to tackling segregated housing in Connecticut. The Fair Share system, which is followed in New Jersey, would change zoning regulations in towns to encourage the development of affordable housing. It would give towns control over development while requiring some degree of development of affordable housing in all of Connecticut's towns.

The Commission knows this is just the beginning. Comprehensive reform needs to take place not only in suburban areas but in cities. Resources for affordable housing and access to food, services, education, and open spaces need to be made within our cities. Residents should have a real choice as to where they want to live and should not be required to move to suburban areas for safe affordable housing. This can be achieved with investment in our cities.

The Commission eagerly looks forward to working with the legislature and all of the various stakeholders toward this life-changing goal. The impact zoning reform would have on our state and the people who live in it is beyond measure. Please make this the year we start the hard work necessary to end housing segregation in Connecticut.