



The National Organization of Minority Architects – Connecticut Chapter

March 14, 2021

Written Testimony in Support of:

SB 1024: AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES, QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS

and:

SB 6611: AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND OTHER POLICIES REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

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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,

NOMAct is the Connecticut Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects. We are part of a nationwide organization of over 1800 minority architects and allied professionals. Our mission is to advocate for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the architectural profession. Our vision is to create more diverse teams within the architectural profession to drive the profession forward and embody the communities we serve

NOMAct wishes to express our support of SB 1024 and 6611 as keys to begin improving housing diversity and as first step in reversing decades of land use policies and regulations that have created systemic racial and economic segregation across the State of Connecticut.

SB 1024 promotes principles of “smart” growth and development that, if implemented, will provide vitally needed housing while protecting and nurturing the natural and historic resources of our state. In particular, we commend the following elements of the resolution:

- We believe ADUs are an important solution in providing greater density, affordability, and livability in existing communities and neighborhoods while minimizing sprawl and the development of greenfield sites. Regulatory barriers or impediments to ADUs should be removed in both urban and suburban communities.
- We believe that training for commissioners is essential for enabling these civic volunteers to learn more about, and better navigate, the issues of zoning laws, land use regulations, the history of redlining and housing discrimination, and interpreting extremely technical documents such as site plans, surveys, and architectural schematics. Armed with such training, commissioners and zoning enforcement officials will be able to think and act with greater knowledge, empathy, and ability and therefore better serve their communities.
- We believe affordable housing must play a larger role in any dialogue over housing and improving social and economic equity of our state. While ten percent affordable seems well-established as a baseline, we would urge there be consideration to going higher percentages such as twenty percent through some sort of “carrot, not stick” approach that promotes more affordable housing that is also resilient, dignified and desirable.



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- We believe model design guidelines for buildings and streets- when authored correctly- can make for safe, desirable, and sociable places to live for people of all ages, races, and incomes that benefit all and remove barriers that cause exclusion and segregation.

We commend the call for the establishment of a model design guideline workgroup with eleven members representing varied stakeholders. There is great precedent in the State for similar work groups which author and assess similar architecture/engineering/construction-related codes, such as building and fire codes. As with those regulations, a model design guideline manual must prove effective in implementation while not stifling innovation or creativity. The authoring of the guidelines and the design review and approvals process must account for a high degree of interpretation and variation. Architects are uniquely trained to bring precisely that level of creativity and adaptability while working within a set of structured rules and provisions, therefore we believe should be more represented in the make-up of the workgroup, which should have at least four slots dedicated to professional architects.

Further, we believe the model design guideline work group should be diverse in composition, to better reflect the Connecticut society and the varied urban and suburban communities of our state. We believe at least one or more of the architect slots should be reserved for a minority architect, and would encourage a similar diversity-focused lens be applied to the other positions.

SB6611 begins to address existing limitations on the distribution of housing options. More than 90% of the state and its suburban areas are designated exclusively for single family zoning, which have resulted in homogeneity in housing typologies, low density, and sprawl. SB6611 provides a roadmap for generating a housing options across the state while empowering each town to determine for itself how it will contribute to meeting the affordable housing needs of its region.

These bills are positive steps towards rectifying decades- nearly a century- of policies and practices which have made zoning a tool for creating separate and unequal places in our state. They provide an opportunity to revisit these policies and commit ourselves to doing better as a society. We hope you will support both.

On behalf of NOMAct, thank you for the opportunity to express our opinions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paolo Campos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Paolo Campos, AIA, NOMA
NOMAct - 2021 President, Founding Architect Member