

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

My name is Fatima Cecunjanin and I am a resident of Wallingford. I am testifying to communicate my strong support for Connecticut SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems.

Connecticut desperately needs zoning reform. According to the Zoning Atlas, of the three million zoned acres in Connecticut, about 90.6 percent is zoned for single-family homes as of right. By comparison, only 28.5 percent allows for two units as of right, 2.3 percent allows for three units, and 2 percent allows for four or more. Eight towns don't allow any multifamily housing at all. Zoning hurdles are a primary reason that Connecticut is so highly segregated by race and income. More than two-thirds of people of color live in just 15 of the state's 169 municipalities, according to a recent report from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. I have my own reflections on housing in Connecticut, having lived here most of my life and having lived in multiple different housing types.

As a first generation American with parents who were still settling into life in the U.S., my family moved around a lot out of necessity, and we moved through many different housing types; mostly multi-family homes and high-density apartment complexes which was what my dad could afford at the time. We finally settled into an apartment complex on Silas Deane Hwy in Rocky Hill. These were some of the best days of my childhood- there were always kids to play outside with, and they were all of diverse backgrounds; I never felt like an outsider because a lot of those kids had similar backgrounds as me. Everyone shared resources, and I remember our tight-knit neighborhood being deeply communal. All the neighborhood kids knew that my mom baked bread every week and would crowd by our stoop for a warm piece of bread with jam, and my mom knew she could call any of these kids' moms if she needed a sitter or if there was an emergency, and vice versa.

I remember when we first moved to our very first house in Westbrook when I was around 11, and how proud my dad was that we had achieved the "American Dream". The whole town is comprised mostly of single-family detached housing. I remember 11-year-old me being literally shocked by the lack of diversity when I first went to school. I don't think I had any idea that places like this actually existed. Me and my four siblings felt like aliens. We would often come home after school and talk about how weird it was being the kids from Hartford area with funny names. There was an instance I remember very clearly. It was the day my dad brought me to my new elementary school for the first time to meet the principal and my new teachers. I remember my dad seemed quiet and deep-in-thought as we left. Years later he explained to me that he had faced Islamophobic prejudice from the school principal that day. How her tone had changed and she started treating my dad rudely after he explained to her the background of his name and my name and that we were Muslims.

While I ended up having a good enough childhood and young adulthood in Westbrook, all of this is to say that I often miss what me and my family had in Rocky Hill- our tight-knit community, being understood by our neighbors, the warmth of the community. I just think that a lot of communities in Connecticut could use some of that. The wealthy, single-family communities seem to breed a certain single-mindedness that is detrimental and has generational impacts. It's time for a change. We need more abundant housing and more diverse types of housing to achieve these more vibrant, understanding communities.

For these reasons, I strongly support SB 1024 and urge you to vote in favor.

Sincerely,

Fatima Cecunjanin
145 Quinnipiac St, Apt 2A
Wallingford, CT 06492