



SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

TESTIMONY ON SB 1024

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

via email to pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

By: *Melvyn Colón, Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance*

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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:

By way of introduction, I am a Hartford resident and executive director of the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance, which is a nonprofit partnership between Connecticut Childrens' Medical Center, Hartford Hospital, and Trinity College, though I do not speak for those institutions in my testimony today. I have a graduate degree in planning from MIT and have worked for decades in community and economic development. I also served on the City of Hartford's Planning and Zoning Commission for five years, where we shepherded through nationally-recognized zoning reforms that prioritized equity and sustainability.

I am writing in strong favor of SB 1024. It is not the only thing we need to do - indeed, to really lay the groundwork for equity, we should do far more - but it is an important start to reversing the legacy of discrimination that has been established by our current zoning framework.

Since Connecticut enacted its Zoning Enabling Act nearly 100 years ago, Connecticut's zoning laws have become progressively more restrictive. By many measures, Connecticut has the most restrictive zoning laws of any state in the country. As a result, Connecticut's housing stock is unaffordable, pricing out too many and causing both economic and environmental disruption.

This artificial constriction on housing supply—specifically denser, more affordable housing—excludes Black, Hispanic, and other racial minority residents from Connecticut's affluent suburbs. The parallelism

between redlining maps—which distinguish between green, “best” neighborhoods and red, “hazardous” neighborhoods—and contemporary zoning maps—which invariably allow multifamily housing in formerly “red” zones and only single-family homes in green zones—make the connection between historic, overt forms of discrimination and today’s more subtle variations apparent. Housing scholars recently [writing as amici](#) to the U.S. Supreme Court agree that too many suburbs “lock in racial exclusivity with facially-neutral zoning ordinances that forbid construction of affordable housing. Requiring larger lot development and low-density zoning depresses growth of rental housing, increases housing costs, and limits the influx of African-American and Latino households.”

SB 1024 represents a consensus set of reforms that would bring overdue change to our state. Opening up at least some multifamily housing in municipalities with transit stations or concentrated development sets a necessary baseline. Far from stripping local control, these common sense measures ensure that all municipalities do their part, and that some towns aren’t left holding the bag for others that distort the regional economy and housing market.

I also want to point out that for cities like Hartford, empowering towns to phase out nonconforming residential uses is long overdue. In the Frog Hollow neighborhood where my organization does its primary work, residential property values and quality of life are deteriorated by just a few nuisances and blighted properties. Allowing towns to phase these out over time will pave the way for new development and improve quality of life in neighborhoods like Frog Hollow.

Connecticut’s future depends on dynamism and diversity. But to get there, we cannot be held hostage by an unquestioning devotion to steady habits. Instead, we must embrace smart, sustainable growth policies like those that make up SB 1024.