

TO: CT General Assembly Planning and Development Committee
FROM: Ronald D. Corwin
RE: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials, and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems
Date: March 15th, 2021

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

Thank you to the committee for considering and hearing testimony on SB 1024.

I strongly commend those willing to have debate and public hearings on this crucial issue.

Surely it is the case that testimony and your own consideration of issues coming before your committee are described as essential elements of fairness, equality, opportunity, indeed vital to the very freedoms we maintain are at the core of American democracy. The matter before you now is nothing less.

In the United States we knew from the beginning that our framework, though laudatory, advanced in many ways for its time, was not perfect. The Constitutional flaws were understood by the Founders, the citizens and all the inhabitants of our land: people of color, slaves, women, Native Americans, immigrants. So, from the beginning, the Founders and others knew the United States had unfinished business: to create a more perfect union. We are still at it.

We are still in the process of giving birth to a more perfect union...there is no birth without pain.

To this moment in our history, the effort to right the wrongs by the community of color has been relentless, constant, widespread and brave within the community to right the wrongs. We have, within our nation also had two major chances to right the wrongs and directly engage white communities: the Civil War (1860s) and the Civil Rights movement in the mid-20th Century. In both cases there were advances but they were less than complete.

By the Civil War slavery was ended, the 13th 14th and 15th Amendments were passed and Reconstruction was put in place after the war. But all of that gave way to the end of Reconstruction [Compromise of 1876] and the advance of Jim Crow; segregation supported by law and practice and the continued denial of equality in the workplace, in schools, in recreation, public accommodations, house of worship, in housing, everywhere...not to mention the violence and terror. All elements of life were affected. In housing, the subject of SB1024, Levittown can serve as an example. Home from World War II, having literally their put lives on the line Levittown, the largest publicly supported housing program in the United States had clauses in its deeds prohibiting sales to African Americans – put in by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) of the United States. Hard to believe...

Which brings us to SB1024. In fact, the creation of mostly white suburbs is a direct descendent of federal policy for extended periods of time. The beauty of the moment is that citizens of color now buttressed by more engaged and understanding elements of the white community are putting thought, understanding, effort and heart behind the efforts to make the changes in the social system that are crucial to the next essential step.

SB1024 is a vital, indeed.

Thank you for your attention.

Ronald D. Corwin, Chair, Coalition for Westport