

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Michael Coulom / Berkeley, CA, formerly of Tolland and Hartford, CT

Re: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Date: March 15, 2021

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 Michael Coulom and I'm testifying in support of SB 1024.

Before I begin, I want you to know that I love Connecticut. I grew up playing in the woods in Tolland, stepping through skunk cabbage and holding my nose. After graduating from college, I got my very first apartment to myself in Hartford, where I worked as a planner for five years. During that time I had the pleasure of getting to know even more parts of Connecticut, travelling to towns and cities across the state to listen to residents and elected officials about what their communities needed to thrive. At the moment I'm in California, where I moved to study Urban Planning at UC Berkeley, and I sorely miss Connecticut.

Reflecting back, zoning played a big part in how I came to see my world. At my mostly White high school in West Hartford, I distinctly remember jeers by the visiting Kent softball team that the new fence around the school was necessary because we were so close to the "ghetto" that was Hartford. Never in our raucous self-defense did we consider the original definition of a ghetto, or its purpose- a confined geographic area meticulously designed to confine undesirable minority populations. One of the first ghettos, in Venice, Italy, had bridges that were raised at night so that the Jewish residents couldn't leave. The bridges weren't controlled from inside the ghetto though, but by the surrounding communities. Exclusionary zoning, while much more banal, plays a similar role in keeping people who have historically been discriminated against in their place, and blocking their access to opportunity.

SB 1024's provisions for Main Streets, Transit-Oriented Development, and Accessory Dwelling Units will make significant positive contributions to towns and cities across the state, and address many of the root causes of economic and racial segregation in Connecticut. The bill's proposals focus on creating a gentle flexibility in town centers and near train and CT **fastrak** stations. These proposals give towns and cities significant discretion in defining the boundaries of these districts, while creating new ladders to

opportunity for a variety of family types in each duplex, triplex, or fourplex. Paired with the bill's model form-based code provisions, communities will have free and easily accessible resources to implement zoning improvements in a manner that is timely and consistent with their community's architectural context.

Living in a diverse and inclusive community with housing options at a range of affordability levels is important to me. I want to return to Connecticut, and hope to one day have a family. As a gay couple, it's particularly important to my partner and I that a community be a diverse and inclusive place to raise our future children. Couples like us who are unable to conceive or carry children also have to weigh the high costs of adoption or surrogacy against homeownership. The biases driving many municipal zoning codes seem more concerned with regulating the type of people who get to live there, rather than what gets built, and I wonder whether my partner and I, and people like us, would make the cut. Zoning reform is a significant lever at your disposal to address issues of racial and economic equity and injustice here at home. Please use it.

We need zoning reform now. Vote YES on SB 1024.