



TESTIMONY ON **Bill 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: *Maryam Elahi, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern CT*

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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:

I am so grateful for the opportunity to comment on **Bill SB 1024** on behalf of the Community Foundation of Eastern CT.

Our Community Foundation serves 42 towns in eastern Connecticut and is comprised of over 560 charitable funds. The Foundation collaborates with partners to put philanthropy into action to address the needs, rights and interests of the region, focusing on four priority areas: empowering youth, promoting basic needs and rights, preserving the environment, and advancing animal welfare. We work towards a healthy, sustainable, and thriving Eastern Connecticut with greater equity for all. Our assets are currently over \$113 million and we have given out over \$72 million in grants and scholarships since our inception in 1983. It is clear to us that **An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems** will further our goals in Eastern CT.

With our Foundation's support, DesegregateCT created the [Connecticut Zoning Atlas](#), a first-of-its-kind tool that displays how each of Connecticut's 2,600+ zoning districts treat housing, and has shown us that there is much more work to be done to provide inclusive and affordable housing. For example, it shows us that while 73% of single-family districts allow ADUs, only 57% allow them as of right. Some municipalities, like Stamford, do not allow them at all. DesegregateCT's research has given more quantifiable evidence to demonstrate what we have known for decades: we do not provide diverse enough housing for people with different housing needs, and it's time to do something about it.

In Eastern Connecticut, we are seeing a housing shortage, which means people are choosing to live in Rhode Island rather than Connecticut. When that happens, Connecticut loses out on people shopping at

our stores, eating at our restaurants, and contributing to our tax base. We need to create abundant housing, so that we can attract people to make Eastern Connecticut thrive.

Among the proposals that would create housing, legalizing accessory dwelling units (or “ADU”) is a [proven method](#). While ADUs are allowed in much of Eastern Connecticut, many towns require public hearings. These strict requirements make it very difficult for Eastern Connecticut residents to build ADUs. We need to capitalize on the significant increase in housing demand within Eastern Connecticut by allowing homeowners to reap the benefits of ADUs. More ADUs would benefit Eastern Connecticut’s young people, seniors, and people with disabilities who need these types of inclusive housing to live in our communities. Additionally, because ADUs are nestled within single family homes, they are a good option for creating accessible housing unobtrusively in residential neighborhoods. In order to progress forward as a region, we need a uniform approach. What happens in one town affects the well-being of neighboring towns. Our solutions should transcend town borders.

An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems’ provisions concerning training for land use commissioners are also vital for the health of Eastern Connecticut. As you know, land use commissioners and other volunteer municipal leaders make impactful decisions about engineering and legal issues that shape our towns for decades. Despite this, there is no formal training requirement. If the legislature adopts this bill, commissioners will receive at least six hours of training per year on fair housing practices and the technical aspects of land use. Training will better equip our commissioners to make zoning decisions. Additionally, training can protect our small towns in Eastern Connecticut. There are currently 159 active cases where local zoning authorities are being sued for process violations. Some are in Eastern Connecticut and may cost our towns hundreds of thousands of dollars each. As a state, we must commit to giving commissioners the training they deserve and saving towns money.

This bill will help Eastern Connecticut grow and prosper by increasing the amount of inclusive housing and equipping our local zoning leaders with the skills that they need to do their jobs. Thank you for allowing me to testify, and I urge the swift passage of **Bill SB 1024**.