

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

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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:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of SB 1024.

I am an undergraduate student at Trinity College. However, my story starts very far from Hartford -and even outside the United States- in the country of Guatemala. Since I was little, I always dreamed about leaving my country to receive a better education so that one day I would be able to contribute back to the place where I was raised. At the age of 16, I left my country for the first time. After that, I applied to several different undergraduate programs in the United States because I believed the education standard was very high and that it will later help me access lots of career opportunities.

With my experience moving to this country, I was shocked at the extreme wealth and racial disparities between American cities and suburbs. Connecticut has long faced a housing affordability crisis, but [CoVid-19 has accentuated the lack of housing stock](#) for low-and middle-income residents. After researching these issues through my coursework, I realized that there were many causes for these disparities. One of them is zoning. Connecticut has very exclusionary zoning that concentrates poverty and wealth in specific towns in the state.

As a result of this realization, I started volunteering with Desegregate Connecticut a few months ago. It has been eye-opening. Together, the team, from mostly small towns from over the state, have done a significant amount of research into zoning and its impact on Connecticut. Among other things, the team developed a [Zoning Atlas](#), which is a very efficient tool to visualize how unequal our state is. For instance, only 2% of all the land in the state is currently zoned for developing family housing of four or more units without a public hearing whereas 90.6% of the state's land is zoned for single-family housing. Furthermore, some of the towns have ridiculously high parking mandates and very large minimum size lots which fosters free-market social exclusion by making housing unaffordable. The proposed bill addresses these inequalities by encouraging multi-family housing in a few targeted places, including main streets and around transit stations. It also proposes to cap parking minimums which will create more housing and will also make the cost of building housing less expensive.

Not only as a first-time home-renter but as an immigrant, my hopes about finding the type of housing that fits my needs in CT are very low. However, I believe that the proposals in SB1024 can help alleviate the weight of the housing market not only for youth and immigrants but for all the residents in the state without compromising single-family ownership.

One of them is making Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) allowed as of right in the state. Because of their relatively small size, ADUs are already a very affordable option that caters not only to youths but to seniors and multi-generational families. Furthermore, based on the large area of the state that is zoned for single-family housing, ADUs are also an easy way to diversify housing stock without impacting the community's architectural character. Another essential proposal for youths is the one densifying the areas around main streets and transit stations, because 10% of the larger housing

development units in these areas will be affordable and because these units will be located in high opportunity areas and accessible to jobs and public transportation.

For all the reasons stated above, I urge you to pass SB1024 as it will help diversify housing stock and provide more affordable housing while making the state more inclusive. Thank you for considering my testimony and I hope you also share my hopes about making Connecticut more equitable and more welcoming for future generations.

All the best,

Rocio Fernandez Gutierrez