

TESTIMONY ON SB 1024, SB 1026, and HB 6611

SB 1024 - AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES, QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.

SB 1026 - AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING FOR CERTAIN PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICIALS.

HB 6611 - AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND OTHER POLICIES REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT.

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 a member of Spring Forward, a neighborhood group established to increase housing equity in Hamden. We support SB 1024, HB 6611, and SB 1026, in conjunction, because these bills tackle the reason our group exists: to address the historic structural racism in Connecticut housing. Our state's exclusionary zoning laws are well documented, and have been used for decades to maintain historic patterns of segregation that were established early in the 20th century. Therefore, we strongly support zoning law reforms like SB 1024 and SB 1026, which can make our neighborhoods more diverse, more vibrant, and more cohesive. However, we must also confront the consequence of longtime housing discrimination—which is the dearth of affordable housing in Connecticut, and the massive racial and economic disparities that housing inequity perpetuates. That's why the Fair Share Zoning practices laid out in HB 6611 must also be passed if we hope to achieve truly effective reform.

Spring Forward is an all-volunteer, bi-partisan and multigenerational neighborhood action group interested in expanding housing opportunities for all. Over the last six months, Spring Forward has quickly grown to include nearly 200 interested community members who want to see more equitable distribution of housing opportunity across our neighborhood, town and state, as well as investment in the businesses and housing of historically underserved districts. Amidst the racial inequities highlighted by the pandemic, last summer's tragic murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter protests that followed, we realized that if we wanted to see social justice and racial equality, we literally needed to start where we live. While Hamden is a diverse town, our closely knit neighborhood remains primarily white. While many of us were aware of the practice of redlining, we didn't know the extent to which it had been practiced in our own neighborhood. We have spent months researching this history, and examining the reasons for our homogenous demographics and housing stock.

It could not be more clear that historically racist practices, abetted by outdated zoning, have kept Connecticut towns segregated and inequitable. Resolving this housing crisis will require a long term, multi-pronged approach. SB 1024 offers great first steps. Spring Forward supports

the allowance of smaller multi-family units and accessory dwelling units in our neighborhood and others like it. Village-based neighborhoods like ours were built to accommodate socioeconomic diversity, but zoning has become increasingly prohibitive toward affordable housing. Hamden, like more than half of Connecticut towns, allows for ADUs; however the additional restrictions applied to ADUs often make them unfeasible to build, own or occupy.

While our group is intent on starting the process of housing reform, we can't accomplish goals of widespread environmental and economic solutions piecemeal. SB 1024, HB 1166, and SB 1026 are bills that, together, make our communities more inclusive, environmentally conscious, prosperous and beautiful. Please support these bills.

Lauren Garrett
Hamden, CT