

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](mailto:pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov)

By: Robby Hill, DesegregateCT

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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 giving me the opportunity to express my beliefs. I would like to offer my support for Senate Bill 1024.

My name is Robby Hill, and I'm an undergraduate at Yale and the partnerships coordinator for Desegregate Connecticut. Unlike many of my peers at Yale, I'm not from a city. I didn't grow up in the suburbs of New York or Los Angeles, but just up I-91 in Easthampton, Massachusetts - a former mill town with a population under 20,000.

I'm appealing to you not as a student with temporary residency or as a zoning reform advocate, but as a native New Englander who has been privileged to call Connecticut home for the past two years, and who would like to do so for years to come.

I live in a duplex in New Haven on a street peppered with single-family homes, mixed use buildings, and multifamily residences. I live within walking distance of cafes, restaurants, and clothing stores that have not just weathered the pandemic, but thrived, thanks to increased foot traffic and community revitalization. This downtown vibrancy was not preordained; it was spurred by zoning codes that encouraged walkability and allowed for people of all incomes and racial backgrounds to call our neighborhood home.

I don't want every town in Connecticut to resemble downtown New Haven, nor do I think they should. The distinct architectural history of our municipalities is part of what makes Connecticut great. SB 1024 takes this into consideration, establishing an independent commission to design town-specific model codes that municipalities can adopt at their own discretion.

That being said, I believe that there are at least a few principles that residents from all 169 towns can agree are vital to the success of our state: equitable access to resources, availability of good-paying jobs, and a sincere commitment to environmental protection. SB 1024 marks one of the most earnest attempts made in recent years to commit ourselves to these three principles.

It is a fact that Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the nation along both racial and income lines. The origins of segregation are complex and pernicious, but it is necessary that we acknowledge the reality of segregation so that we can accept our shared responsibility to right the wrongs of the past.

SB 1024's provisions to upzone around transit stations and Main Streets mark an important step towards diversifying our housing, making housing more accessible and affordable. Accessory dwelling unit legalization, likewise, promises to expand housing access in existing single-family zoning districts. These reforms are needed urgently, both for their impact on the housing stock and on the state's economy.

For much of the past year, some have framed the statewide conversation around zoning as a zero sum game; those nonbelievers claim that affordable housing advocates, developers, townspeople, and planning and zoning commissioners can't all stand to benefit from statewide reform. This is a farce. I'll ask you instead to think about what we all will gain from increased housing diversity and availability: flourishing, walkable downtowns, diverse communities, and decades of economic renewal.

Coming to Connecticut in 2019, I never could have imagined committing myself to zoning reform, but I also never could have foreseen the passion I would feel for this state and the people in it. I'm asking you to make a commitment to Connecticut as well - one born out of past inequity but dedicated to future prosperity for all.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,  
Robby Hill