



Testimony before the Planning and Development Committee  
Jim Horan, Executive Director  
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**Support**

**H.B. No. 6107 'AAC THE REORGANIZATION OF THE ZONING ENABLING ACT AND THE PROMOTION OF MUNICIPAL COMPLIANCE'**

**H.B. 6613 'AAC ACCESSORY APARTMENTS, MIDDLE HOUSING AND MULTIFAMILY HOUSING'**

**S.B. No. 1024 'AAC ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES, QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS'**

**Support with Amendments**

**S.B. 1026 'AAC TRAINING FOR CERTAIN PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICIALS'**

Sen. Cassano, Rep. McCarthy Vahey, Sen. Hwang, Rep. Zullo, and members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.B 1024, S.B. 1026 (with amendments), H.B. 6107, and H.B. 6613. I am Jim Horan, Executive Director of the Connecticut program of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

LISC is a national community development organization that has worked in Connecticut since 1984. LISC Connecticut is a long-term member of HOMEConnecticut and supports Desegregate CT. LISC's mission is to create resilient, inclusive communities: great places to live, work, do business, and raise families. Housing is a centerpiece of this work—families need not only affordable, high quality housing but access to jobs and economic opportunities. Unfortunately, exclusionary zoning policies get in the way of this goal. Moreover, these policies limit the dynamism of Connecticut communities. The best way to maintain the rich character of our communities is to grow and diversify—not to choke off growth and development.

Much of LISC's work is to revitalize urban neighborhoods and attract investment for affordable housing and other development in central city neighborhoods, including more than 3,000 units of housing and more than 300,000 square feet of commercial space and community facilities. In addition, LISC operates Housing Connections, a technical assistance

program to help local housing organizations increase the supply of affordable housing in rural and suburban communities, with leadership and financial support from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority. Since its inception in 2007, Housing Connections has helped create 639 units of affordable housing in 18 suburban and rural communities, with 550 units in the development pipeline in an additional 15 communities. And yet many of these communities still fall short of meeting the state mandated minimum threshold of 10% of housing stock be designated as affordable.

It is no secret that Connecticut is highly segregated, with central cities that are largely populated by people who are Black and Latino, and suburbs and rural towns that are mostly white. To address these persistent disparities, LISC seeks to build neighborhoods of choice in all communities, and provide affordable housing opportunities in every town.

Research from the Urban Institute has revealed that more inclusive communities – measured by both income and racial equality – are economically healthier.<sup>1</sup> The bills LISC is supporting today will help increase the availability of quality, affordable housing in every town, thereby promoting economic growth, increasing diversity, and creating opportunities for households with low- and moderate incomes, particularly Black and Latino households that disproportionately live in poverty.

We request that the committee **SUPPORT H.B. No. 6107, AAC the Reorganization of the Zoning Enabling Act and the Promotion of Municipal Compliance.** H.B. 6107 advances the state’s policy goal of ensuring families living with low- and moderate-incomes have access to housing that is safe and affordable in communities across the state – not just Connecticut’s urban centers that have for too long have been home to a disproportionate number of homes deemed “affordable.” This bill would remove the highly subjective “character of the district” consideration, which LISC has seen be used to hinder a number of proposed housing developments through the Housing Connections program – even when there has been support for these developments by local residents. All reasonable aspects of “character” are fully covered by other sections of § 8-2, including considerations of historic preservation, environmental impact, density, scale, location, and the suitability of uses.

**We request that the committee SUPPORT H.B. 6613, AAC Accessory Apartments, Middle Housing and Multifamily Housing.** Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer a distinctive affordable housing opportunity, and a vehicle for homeowners to generate additional income or provide housing for family members. Despite many towns allowing this housing already in some form, few units have come to fruition. Permitting ADUs, as well as small multifamily housing, more broadly and without undue restrictions, will promote the incremental growth

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<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, K. and Fedorowicz, M. (2019) *Building Economic Growth and Inclusion Together: Insights from a Dialogue among Bosch Alumni Network Members from the US and Europe.* Urban Institute.

of lower cost housing and bring new residents to town centers and transit station areas, while continuing to allow municipalities to control the physical and site characteristics of their community through zoning ordinances, health codes, building codes, and other regulations.

**We request that the committee SUPPORT S.B. 1024, AAC Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems.** Zoning laws dictate how we design and build our communities. However, Connecticut’s zoning laws allow communities to restrict the types of homes, and therefore, the types of residents, it believes belong. If Connecticut is to revive its economy in a post-COVID world, zoning reform is essential to help boost our economy, make our communities more equitable, and protect our environment.

S.B. 1024 focuses on smart reforms to increase housing, while also building a more diverse housing stock, and prevents the continued negative environmental impacts of sprawl by supporting communities in planning for appropriate density.

LISC supports the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) provisions outlined in S.B. 1024. TOD provides housing and retail services in close proximity to transit stops, which in turn helps reduce traffic, encourages use of mass transit, and helps create more walkable communities. It is also a vehicle for building affordable housing.

This proposal strikes the right balance between local control and state intervention. S.B. 1024 sets a modest floor for density near transit—one that every town with a transit stop should not only meet but exceed. Local control cannot be an excuse for saying no to any new housing, particularly when the crisis of climate change requires us to rethink our land use patterns and promote more sustainable practices. Instead, local control should empower municipalities to determine how and where they will channel new development. S.B. 1024 would lift arbitrary caps on development in areas near transit stations, opening up new housing opportunities in “high opportunity” areas and in areas with easy access to jobs and services. Increasing housing supply—particularly denser housing more likely to be affordable to first time home buyers and middle income earners—should be one of the legislature’s foremost priorities.

LISC operates the Transit Oriented Development Fund with support from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and the CT Department of Economic and Community Development. This fund provides site acquisition and predevelopment capital to support TOD along the CTfastrak corridor; MetroNorth, Hartford Rail, and Shoreline East lines, and most recently expanded to include seven-day service local bus routes. To date, the TOD Fund has been undersubscribed, but LISC is confident that with the proposals presented in

S.B. 1024, more communities will identify this particular development as an opportunity to generate economic development, while simultaneously meeting critical housing needs.

S.B. 1024 also makes provisions to support increased density along Main Street corridors. Many, if not most, downtown areas in Connecticut's cities and towns have fewer residents today than they did in 1970. While some of this shift may be due to changes in demand, exclusionary zoning regulations have played a big role in this exodus by barring the construction of diverse housing types like duplexes and row houses, even near downtown areas. Supporting increased housing development in these areas would restore much needed vibrancy and foot traffic to one of Connecticut's most precious resources: its historic downtowns. Many younger renters and first time homebuyers want to be closer to goods and services, but cannot afford or do not want to rent or buy a single-family home. The main streets housing proposal would allow for diverse housing types near downtowns throughout the state, spurring development to tap into that demand.

Similar to the TOD Fund, LISC also operates a Come Home to Downtown Fund to support housing on the upper floors of downtown commercial buildings. It is also undersubscribed – due to a number of factors, including limited surrounding development to leverage. By supporting zoning that promotes housing development in downtown areas, communities will have the opportunity to spur economic growth and create affordable places for both existing and new residents.

**We request that the committee SUPPORT, with amendments, S.B. 1026, AAC Training for Certain Planning and Zoning Officials.** Planning & Zoning commissions make important land use decisions that affect the function of their communities for many years. Unlike several nearby states, Connecticut does not offer a training curriculum, or require training, for commissioners. Connecticut does, however, require training for inlands and wetlands commissioners through DEEP. We recommend that this bill be amended to increase the minimum hours of training to five (5) hours annually and require all members of planning and zoning commissions in Connecticut meet this minimum standard. We recommend the bill be amended to direct the state to develop such a training curriculum, to be administered in-person and online.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your consideration.