



## TESTIMONY ON SB1024:

### *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: **Pastor AJ Johnson**, Urban Hope Refuge Church

**March 15, 2021**

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 the opportunity to submit testimony on SB1024. On behalf of Urban Hope Refuge Church, I would like to offer supportive testimony for this bill.

Urban Hope Refuge Church is a home for passionate worship and community activism based in Hartford. We believe that following Jesus requires collaboration with others to strengthen our community and make life better for our neighbors. It is with this perspective that we support SB1024.

**Racism is the number one public health crisis facing Black Americans.** Immediate attention and intentional action are required to dismantle the systemic structures that have marginalized, oppressed, and killed Black people in this country at disproportionate rates. The declining physical and mental wellbeing of Black Americans is evidence of the violence that has been inflicted through systemic racism. The public health crisis fueled by racism facing Black Americans manifests in a variety of ways, including segregation, contributing to disparate health outcomes by race and place, including lower life expectancy and higher asthma rates, diabetes, hypertension, and more.

Just as Northern cities embraced over-policing as a response to the Great Migration, our suburbs embraced overzealous zoning at the same time and for the same reasons. To this day, these codes prevent reasonably-priced housing from being built in high-resource suburbs and the results, given our massive racial wealth gap, are not only predictable but intended. These exclusionary codes not only exacerbate racial and economic inequality, they cost the state billions by raising the local cost of living.

Over the summer, we called on the Governor and Legislature to commit to an equitable housing agenda that invests to revitalize without displacement, enables tenant choice, balances the locations of government subsidized housing investments throughout the state, and reforms land use laws to give everyone an opportunity to thrive. The differences in average household wealth and income – [both nationally](#) and [in Connecticut](#) – fall overwhelmingly along racial lines. SB 1024 is one of many things that we need to do to satisfy these goals.

And specifically, SB 1024:

- **Stops towns from denying applications on the basis of people’s racial characteristics, source of income, or income level of applicants.** We have heard too often about public hearings where people comment about “welfare recipients” or “people who will change the character of our towns.” The coded - but sometimes explicit racism - must end, and that’s what this bill does.
- **Helps move Connecticut to clear rules, decided in advance.** Saying “as of right” doesn’t mean that towns give up local control, which is what some people have been saying. It means that local zoning boards articulate requirements for new development, and then staff executes on those requirements. It means housing doesn’t have to go through biased public hearings. The model form-based codes that focuses on the form of buildings, rather than their uses, will also be an equitable regulatory framework.
- **Rethinks Parking.** Countless housing projects have been prevented across the state because of onerous parking requirements. Communities ask for as many as 2.5 or 3 parking spaces for even studio and one-bedroom affordable housing units, making it cost-prohibitive for developers. Capping the amount of parking that can be required through the land use approvals process will reduce the costs of housing and prevent overpaving of our green state.
- **Upzoning Transit Areas.** Right now, cities around Connecticut that receive State investments in train stations or CTfastrak stations do not have to change their zoning to enable the mixed-use development that would make the State’s investment worthwhile. SB 1024 has reasonable proposals to ensure that we can get quality, mixed-use real estate development that goes hand in hand with transportation.
- **Empowering Towns to Zone Out Nonconforming Uses.** Right now, if there are “non conforming” property uses that are non-residential but located in residential neighborhoods, Hartford and other cities cannot confront them. Our residential neighborhoods end up housing car lots or abandoned gas stations. This drives down property values in Black and Latino neighborhoods, and impacts the ability of communities to thrive. Our City and residents must be empowered to address this issue. Continuing to allow the depression of property values and assets in communities of color by non-conforming uses will only perpetuate long-running inequalities.
- **Ensures Land Use Commissioners Get Trained.** The training requirement for land use commissioners in SB1024 will help ensure that these community gatekeepers understand the consequences of their decisions. Such additional training, especially in areas of affordable and fair housing policies, are critical to ensure that volunteer commissioners in predominantly white suburban localities understand the dynamics of housing affordability in a state marked by extensive residential segregation.

Across our state, there is a shortage of available affordable housing for our most low-income people. Many residents are left with few options when searching for housing- and are overwhelmingly excluded from many communities across the state. SB 1024 will ensure that greater equity and opportunity are centered in reforms to our state’s land use and zoning regulations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

***Pastor AJ Johnson***

Urban Hope Refuge Church