

Hebron

Coalition on Diversity and Equity

TESTIMONY ON

**SB 1024: An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of
Certain Land use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems**

Testimony by:

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via email to pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

To 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:

It is an honor to deliver this testimony to you. On behalf of the Hebron Coalition for Diversity and Equity (CoDE), I am testifying in support of SB 1024.

CoDE was formed by residents of Hebron in July 2020 following the death of George Floyd and the first-ever rally for racial justice in our town. Our mission is to build a more diverse and vibrant community by increasing community awareness and equal access to housing, education and jobs. In a town that is 97 percent White, we aim to identify and address barriers in town policies, regulations, procedures and practices that might be inadvertently preventing persons of various races, ethnicities and economic status from moving to Hebron.

Today, I would like to detail how Hebron and towns like ours depend on ADUs and can benefit from statewide resources, such as commissioner training and form-based codes. By passing this bill, the state legislature will dismantle barriers to diverse, affordable housing, and empower towns to zone for more inclusive communities.

Here in Hebron, we have seen how [zoning laws](#) that permit ADUs “as-of-right” and [form-based codes](#) benefit our town. Permitting ADUs “as-of-right” can provide naturally affordable living spaces that are perfect for an elderly relative or a young professional who wants to live in our town. Additionally, our form-based code has enabled Hebron to articulate a vision of a thriving community. By incorporating design guidelines into zoning codes, we were able to outline the architectural standards that define our town, while providing property owners and developers greater certainty and predictability about what is allowed. Using our form-based code allowed us to begin developing our town center into a walkable, welcoming ‘downtown’ that is increasing foot traffic and encourages connectivity among residents. It is also a source of pride because of how attractive and cohesive it looks.

Hebron has taken some important steps, but like many small towns in Connecticut, we have a long way to go. According to [state data](#), less than 3% of Hebron's housing stock is considered affordable while almost a quarter of all Hebron residents are considered [cost-burdened](#), meaning they spend over 30% of their income on housing. For example, Hebron still restricts the conversion of detached structures (i.e., barns, detached garages) into usable living spaces and requires no training for the commissioners that make incredibly important and difficult decisions about how we use our land. Such regulations matter when we look to foster a more diverse, equitable, and welcoming community.

Small towns like Hebron will benefit from the reforms proposed in this bill.

The advantages of ADUs are substantial. ADUs can increase single family home resale prices up to [50%](#). ADUs [assist](#) lower and moderate income homeowners by providing supplementary income if they choose to rent out a portion of their single-family home. With thousands across the state struggling with the economic fallout from COVID-19, we need new avenues to grow income and wealth more than ever.

Ultimately, restrictive rules raise housing costs, preventing towns like ours from attracting more diverse populations. An [AARP](#) report showed that ADUs significantly increase housing options for a variety of communities. They are affordable living situations for younger people and also benefit immigrant families, who often live in multigenerational households.

Legalizing ADUs has done very little to change the architectural character of Hebron, nor will it drastically alter the appearance of other, similar towns. Because they are nestled within single-family properties, neighborhoods wouldn't see a major change.

Fundamentally, we see this legislation as reinforcing the power of municipal governments. For example, the ADU provisions in SB 1024 would give towns the ability to create design guidelines, ban short-term rentals, and require owner occupancy.

Likewise, the Model Code and Land Use Commissioner Training provisions will give towns like Hebron the resources and knowledge needed to foster inclusive growth. These provisions represent valuable tools to resource-constrained towns that rely primarily on the hard work of well-intentioned volunteers.

A State-developed model code would give smaller towns access to the wealth of expertise that exists across Connecticut. By developing clear guidelines for new construction, towns can preserve the architectural character of their town while enabling inclusive change. Such a tool will save money and enable towns to make zoning work for them.

Meanwhile, training for land use commissioners is much needed and desired. Land use commissioners make important decisions that affect the ability of a town to grow in smart, equitable, and planful ways. Land use commissioners help turn the goals of residents for the future of their town into reality. Training on topics such as the impact of zoning on the environment and affordable and fair housing practices, will help our town acquire the expertise we need to align our zoning laws with our values. Training, like that

which is available through UConn CLEAR's [Land Use Academy](#), is essential to making better decisions around land use that shape the future of our community.

Over the last eight months, CoDE has engaged in numerous conversations with town officials and residents about why it is so great to live in this town and in this region. One thing is clear – being exclusive is not one of those reasons. In fact, people want to live in a community that is diverse and welcoming. SB 1024 – especially its support of ADUs, model codes, and land use training – will help Hebron and other towns like ours to become diverse and vibrant communities.

On behalf of the Hebron Coalition on Diversity and Equity, I strongly urge the passage of this bill. Thank you to our state legislators for giving me the opportunity to make our voices heard.