

*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:*

Thank you for allowing me to write in favor of SB 1024. My name is Akash Kaza, and I'm a volunteer with DesegregateCT from Simsbury. There are so many reasons to support SB 1024, but I'll focus on one broad and personal one. I'm a young person who plans to settle down here, but for me and for many of my peers, this isn't possible.

We all know Connecticut is a slow-growth state, and young people like me are leaving in droves. There are multiple reasons for this exodus, but a key one is that young people just can't find the types of housing that we're looking for. Like many others have said, we don't see diversity in our housing stock that would appeal to a person just entering the workforce, whether that be a multi-unit building or an accessory dwelling unit in their parents' backyard. We're also not seeing the types of communities that we need to succeed. Young people want walkable communities, while fewer and fewer of us want to rely on cars. We want storefronts and main streets, green space and easy access to transit. Yes, young people want jobs, but it's a two-way street. Businesses want skilled young people, too! Organizations like CBIA have identified this loss of talent as a real problem. If we help build the communities my generation wants, businesses will come calling.

There's another component. Young people want racial and cultural diversity. We want the richness of different life experiences and backgrounds in our communities. We want to live in equitable communities. We marched and protested and organized for it. I love Simsbury, but as the son of immigrants in a 90% white town, I've seen firsthand that we can do more to be inclusive. I've also seen how inclusion would improve my town, and not just for Black and brown residents. Diversity improves academic performance, it helps make towns more vibrant, and it clears up fears we have of one another. I remember when a friend and I tried to go to a movie in Bloomfield and my friend's mom summarily shut us down. It took me a few years to realize that she was afraid of us being in a Black town after dark, a mindset all too common. But proximity is powerful. Living together makes us more accepting. It opens our minds and unleashes our full potential. Inclusive communities aren't just the moral thing to do, they make our communities more appealing.

Some members of the committee have tried to insinuate that we decide where to live based on where opportunity exists. Yes, that's true, but it's not the end-all-be-all. People also want to live in areas that bring them joy. We want to live where their friends and family live. We want to live where we can afford to live. And we want to live where we feel welcome -- where we feel embraced by the community. SB 1024 is about far more than just zoning reform -- it's about

making our communities more inclusive towards those who have been explicitly or implicitly excluded for centuries. I urge the passage of this bill. Thank you.