



Save the Sound[®]

Action for our region's environment.

**Testimony of Save the Sound
Before the Planning and Development Committee**

In support of Senate Bill No. 1024

**AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES,
QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE
DISPOSAL SYSTEMS**

Submitted by Christopher P. Kelly, Esq.

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Save the Sound is a nonprofit organization representing over 4,200 member households and 10,000 activists statewide. Our mission is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and the entire Long Island Sound region. We use legal and scientific expertise and bring citizens together to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations.

Dear Co-Chairs Cassano and McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairs Needleman and Goupil, Ranking Members Hwang and Zullo, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Save the Sound supports passage of SB 1024, an act which would update Connecticut's zoning laws and promote affordable housing. The need for well-planned affordable housing in Connecticut is dire. Expensive housing, driven by inefficient zoning requirements and restrictions on housing stock, has been identified as a major driver of racial and economic inequality. As a matter of equity and fairness, our state needs to provide for a diversity of housing stock across a variety of communities that can offer greater access to quality housing.

Save the Sound believes SB 1024 addresses these needs without sacrificing considerations of environmental integrity, quality, and conservation.

SB 1024 would most directly address the affordable housing crisis by requiring municipalities, many of which do not currently accommodate much housing other than single-family homes, to zone for higher-density housing and mixed-use development near their primary transit stations and main street corridors. This requirement would allow for more housing, of a greater variety, on land already subject to the effects of human development. Most importantly, the bill excludes from this requirement areas which would be unsuitable for development due to safety or environmental concerns, including wetlands, drinking water supply areas, and flood zones.

As an environmental organization, Save the Sound encourages zoning which provides for efficient development and preservation of natural resources. Single-family housing, which overwhelmingly accounts for Connecticut's residential development, is land-intensive and energy-inefficient. Construction of single-family housing relies upon trading natural spaces for as little housing stock as possible, and most often leaving residents without access to public transportation, requiring them to rely solely upon automobiles. The costs are ever greater when

development destroys unique and important natural spaces, which may involve wetlands, coastal forests, watersheds, and other environments like those Save the Sound has protected for years.

An environmentally conscious approach to land use regulation is more important than ever. As the climate crisis looms ever larger, bringing rising sea levels which threaten shoreline communities and intensive flooding across the state, we must be more attentive to how our laws drive unsustainable practices. A climate-smart approach to development has to consider alternatives to our reliance on automobiles. That means planning with mass transit in mind, as well as reducing or eliminating requirements for parking spaces. Simultaneously, we have to recognize the ever-greater value in preserving our natural resources and wild spaces. Wetlands and forests play a dual role in mitigating climate emissions and absorbing the harms of climate change, protecting our communities.

In addition to the higher-density zoning requirements in this bill, SB 1024 will also improve the quality of zoning and land use bodies in Connecticut by requiring the development of model design guidelines by regional councils, as well as land use training for members of land use commissions and zoning enforcement officers. Save the Sound uses many tools to protect Connecticut's environment, including appealing to land use authorities when our natural resources are threatened by unwise development. It is important that these public bodies be given the tools to properly assess the many considerations inherent in their land use roles.

We support SB 1024 because it presents an environmentally conscious approach to land use regulation. The responsibility to zone for fair housing without sacrificing our natural environment still lies with our land use commissions, and organizations like Save the Sound will continue to play our role in protecting the valuable natural resources of our state. But it is vital that Connecticut's laws consider the ultimate consequences of *where* we build housing, *what kind* of housing we construct, and *what ancillary requirements* we attach to new housing development.

Affordable housing and environmentally conscious development are not mutually exclusive outcomes – they can both be achieved through conscientious land use, as required by laws like SB 1024.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Christopher P. Kelly
Christopher P. Kelly, Esq.
Peter B. Cooper Legal Fellow
Save the Sound
900 Chapel Street, Suite 2202
New Haven, CT 06510
(203) 787-0646
ckelly@savethesound.org