

Testimony on SB 1024, 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

By: *Kevin Kurian, DesegregateCT*

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 convening this public hearing. My name is Kevin Kurian, and I'm a college student from Simsbury as well as a Policy Fellow at Desegregate CT. I have lived in Simsbury for nearly my entire life. Like so many other young people living in Connecticut's suburbs, I could not wait to leave my hometown after high school. And I did, getting on the Amtrak to Manhattan just a couple of months after graduation. New York was such a different place than the small, New England town that I called home, and I took so much joy from those differences. As I made a 2AM run to a Halal Guys cart with my friends, living in a place where everything closed at 8 in the evening could not have been farther from my mind. Returning home shortly before the lockdown felt so disappointing.

A couple of weeks into quarantine, I realized that home was not so bad. I had not realized how much I had missed my parents, the hiking trails around my house, and takeout from Tan Wong. It took some time away to realize the beauty that I could find in the place that I had left in such a hurry. I'd guess I'm one of many young people who had this epiphany during the pandemic

Their journeys might be markedly different than my own - maybe they think about moving home after a weekend visiting their parents, or while they're looking through pictures from high school. Those thoughts are often extinguished after a quick look through Zillow. Homes are too expensive.

Less than 5% of Simsbury's housing stock is considered affordable. The town is dominated by single-family homes, and the few apartments that are available are extremely expensive, locking out recent high school or college graduates. That is not sustainable. My town's Zoning Commission has made public their opposition to this bill, and I could not disagree more. Racially charged comments were made about "reverse gentrification" and "undesirable urban housing" being placed in our suburbs. These comments reflect outdated views of what Connecticut should be and may actively prevent young people from coming back to our town. There is so much discourse in my hometown about how to bring younger people here, and they publicly rejected an incredibly feasible way to do so. The only way this bill would have changed Simsbury is to add a modest amount of 2 to 4 family housing in a main street that the Zoning Commission selected. They should listen to the young people. We can develop our downtown a little more, bringing my generation back home and protecting the future of this state. Not only that, but residents of Simsbury who want to downsize could have more options for aging in place.

Among young people who want to come home, people are interested in coming back because of the sense of community, proximity to family, and easy access to nature. SB 1024 holds that ideal at the center of

every single proposal. By concentrating development near main streets, we can protect CT forests and build more walkable communities that enhance the sense of New England community that many of us hold dear. I want to live in a place where I can walk to the grocery store and small businesses from my home, like people often did in a New England that has partially been lost to us. It is important to understand that we are not going to entice Generation Z here with current policies. We need to play to our strengths as a state, and that is exactly what SB 1024 does. It is in this legislative body's hands whether the young people who have left the state are gone for four years, or their entire lives.

The debate that we are having about this bill is existential for the future of towns like my own. I can see so clearly what this state could be if barriers to housing were removed through zoning reform. Bustling suburban downtowns full of happy families and small businesses sprouting up like the trees that blanket our state, because more people means more customers. Lower taxes, because broadening the tax base increases revenue for state and local governments. Increasing student enrollment and a new sense of optimism and opportunity in the land of steady habits. We can chart a new path for our state together. I hope that my testimony, and the testimony of so many others, helps you see this future too. I am proud to support this bill.

Kevin Kurian