

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Matthew D. Larson, Manchester, Connecticut

Re: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Date: March 15, 2021

Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 1024. Passage of this legislation would open a wide range of exciting opportunities for economic development in towns and cities across our state, while simultaneously taking steps to correct the historic barriers to access that make Connecticut one of the most segregated states in the country. As we look to the future, Connecticut must meet the need for abundant and diverse housing.

I was moved by a recent *Hartford Courant* article, "[West Hartford is mostly white, while Bloomfield is largely Black; how that came to be tells the story of racism and segregation in American suburbs](#)," which meticulously laid out the blatantly racist tactics employed by zoning boards and real estate agents in the Greater Hartford area—in recent history, nonetheless—to keep towns segregated under the pretenses of “character” and “to protect property values.” This racism has no place in our state. To begin to correct these deep-seated problems, SB 1024 would level the playing field across communities, allowing for greater freedom and opportunity for all Connecticut residents, especially for the more than two-thirds of Black and Hispanic residents predominantly residing in major urban areas.

To that end, I am encouraged by the forward-thinking and data-driven efforts of “Desegregate Connecticut” to pursue actionable and creative solutions to these issues. I am particularly convinced by an issue highlighted in the *New York Times* article, "[A Push for Zoning Reform in Connecticut](#).” Sara Bronin, the group’s founder, outlines a disturbing warning for our state. Connecticut’s housing is relatively expensive, and as our state’s population rapidly ages, this lack of affordable housing pushes us near the top of most elderly states in the country. We may be the “land of steady habits,” but if we continue to tailor our zoning to an aging population we will miss the chance to attract and retain much needed young families and young professionals.

Though a native of East Hartford, I myself am now one of those young professionals recently drawn to Connecticut. Four years ago, after several years working in Washington, D.C., I purchased a condominium apartment inside a repurposed Cheney Mill on Main Street, Manchester. In addition to being drawn to the town’s rich diversity, I purchased my home for its historic charm and especially for its walkable proximity to the restaurants and shops in the town center. I offer Manchester as a rebuttal to the idea that multifamily

housing may damage a town's "character." On the contrary, towns across our state should leverage their character by repurposing historic and architecturally distinct structures into multifamily dwellings, thereby retaining that charm while also reaping sustainable economic benefits of new taxpayers and businesses attracted to those town centers.

For decades, Connecticut has been an attractive alternative to the more densely populated metropolises of New York and Boston, perhaps never more so than during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We should absolutely welcome these newcomers to our state. However, this population influx has disproportionately impacted longtime Connecticut residents seeking to purchase homes or in need of housing alternatives. Passage of this legislation, particularly in allowing for accessory dwelling units, could help alleviate this lack of housing stock and offer severely needed opportunities for our residents. These new structures will also be useful long after the pandemic has faded, preparing the way for the next generation of young professionals attracted to Connecticut in search of education, employment, and our high quality of life.

Simply put, we need more abundant and more diverse types of housing to achieve a sustainable, vibrant Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration.