

TESTIMONY ON *SB 1024*

via email to pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

By: *Kirsten Morrow, Founder of Holding the Door Open, Simsbury
and Simsbury Inclusive Neighborhood Development Coalition (SINDCo)*

March 10, 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:

It is an honor to deliver this testimony to you. On behalf of Holding the Door Open and SINDCo, I am testifying in support of *SB 1024*.

Holding the Door Open was formed in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests of last summer. Recognizing the need to transfer our town's desire for racial justice into lasting change, we formed an organization to bring people together to both create spaces for discussion and lobby our town government for racially inclusive policies. I formed SINDCo in October of 2020 after seeing interest within our Holding the Door Open community around affordable and inclusive housing. I also recognized the need to create a coalition of town stakeholders to collectively push for a newer reality of affordable and inclusive housing in Simsbury.

Today, I would specifically like to detail how Simsbury and surrounding towns need accessory dwelling units, and the state legislature needs to dismantle the barriers to ADUs by passing this bill.

According to state data, less than 5% of Simsbury's housing stock is considered affordable. While the Simsbury planning and zoning commission has taken the first step to improving housing diversity by permitting attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right, their policies do not go *nearly* far enough. The municipal government restricts detached ADUs and caps floor area at 600 square feet, preventing homeowners from converting their garages into living spaces for elderly relatives who wish to live with their children or young professionals who can bolster our town's economy.

Ultimately, these rules restrict towns like mine 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.

ADUs can increase single family home resale prices up to 50%. These structures can be vehicles of wealth-generation for Simsbury homeowners, if we seize the opportunity to act. ADUs also assist lower and moderate income homeowners by providing supplementary income through rent, if they decide to rent out a portion of their single family home. New income and wealth generation avenues can particularly help homeowners who are struggling with the economic effects of COVID-19. This bill, through its ADU reforms, puts equity first.

When California passed zoning legislation, ADU permits saw an [11-fold](#) increase. If we relax the barriers to converting or building accessory dwelling units, there is evidence to show that Connecticut will see a similar increase in more inclusive types of housing.

Small towns like Simsbury are not afraid of the reforms proposed in this bill. We see this legislation as something that actually reinforces the power of municipal governments. For example, the ADU provisions in *SB 1024* would give municipalities the ability to create design guidelines, ban short-term rentals, and require owner occupancy. *SB 1024*'s ADU provision would legalize detached ADUs and cap floor area at 1,000 square feet or 30% of the primary dwelling, whichever is less. These reforms are needed to further diversify Simsbury's housing stock, ensure the long-term vibrancy of our town, and provide for our elderly.

Legalizing ADUs will do very little to change the architectural appearance of Simsbury and small towns like ours. By definition, ADUs conform with the architectural features of the primary dwelling, nestling perfectly into single-family zoning districts and protecting the quintessential feel and charm of our historic neighborhoods. To reinforce what was stated above, I know of families in Simsbury who wanted to convert their detached garages into ADUs for their grandparents, but couldn't because of existing zoning regulations. Also, immigrant families are more likely to have inter-generational households, and this proposal to allow for ADUs will benefit them as well. There are a number of parents in town who have children with disabilities. Limitations on ADUs prevent these parents from offering their children independent housing options as they become adults. In our town and across Connecticut, there is a critical shortage of affordable housing for people with disabilities, and allowing ADUs on personal property would alleviate that situation for many with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

If more young people do not move to our town, Simsbury will soon be a shadow of what it once was. There is a newfound interest in living within our region and we need to capitalize on it. *SB 1024*, especially its support of ADUs, will help Simsbury endure for decades to come.

I strongly urge the passage of this bill. Thank you to our state legislators for giving me the opportunity to make my voice heard.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Morrow

Founder, Holding the Door Open, Simsbury and Simsbury Inclusive Neighborhood Development Coalition (SINDCo)