

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: Ann O'Brien, Director of Community Engagement

IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services

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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 the opportunity to express my views on behalf of [IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services](#). I am testifying in support of SB 1024.

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to helping refugees, immigrants, and other displaced families restart their lives and enrich our communities in Connecticut. IRIS provides several key services including employment training, legal aid, access to education and health services, as well as case management and housing assistance. We are committed to forging an equitable community with equal opportunity and abundant housing options for immigrants and refugees in Connecticut. While we are based in New Haven, IRIS partners with over 50 community groups across the state of CT to welcome refugees and assist asylum seekers in their goals of self-sufficiency and safety for their families. We partner with these 50+ communities because those communities want diverse communities enriched by the most noble of American traditions -- welcoming the persecuted, those fleeing conflict, from around the world and helping them pursue their own American dream, in safety.

Immigration is foundational to the success of our state. Roughly [15% of the Connecticut population hails from another country](#), or one in every seven residents. We know that immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers enhance the culture and vitality of our towns and cities; this truth lies at the core of the American ethos. But what's acknowledged less is the fact that immigrants also act as an [engine of our state's economy](#), contributing over \$2 billion per year in state and local tax revenue and increasing money circulation by nearly \$18 billion.

Without the housing to meet these immigrant families' needs, we risk losing that which makes Connecticut great: diverse, inclusive communities and reliable, good-paying jobs. We need to take proactive steps to ensure that migrant families are both attracted to Connecticut and able to build new lives here. This commitment starts with the construction of new housing, and the construction of new housing necessitates statewide zoning reform.

We believe that SB 1024 will help achieve this vision. By allowing [Accessory Dwelling Units](#) (ADUs) and multifamily housing as-of-right in desiraband by increasing development around our transit stations and downtowns, we can help diversify housing options in communities to which immigrants and refugees currently do not have access. This modest increase in housing availability

lowers housing costs overall, granting migrants the freedom to settle in all corners of the state. At IRIS, we believe fervently that our communities are made stronger by the presence of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; it's why we have a goal to place a refugee in all 169 towns in Connecticut. These provisions in SB 1024 help make that goal a reality.

This bill also addresses the pressing need to establish a training program for land use commissioners. With the proper training, land use commissioners can better understand how their decisions affect the equity of our towns and cities, which will help ensure that our communities grant immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers equal opportunities.

We have witnessed in towns large and small, real estate agents and landlords unwilling to even consider renting to our clients, evading even the showing of a location. Yet, when our families are able to find housing, they want nothing more than to work and take care of their families in peace. The children in these families are often at the top of their classes in public schools and the adults in the household contribute 20 times over to a community in taxes paid over their lifetime, versus the small amount of benefits they draw upon in their first years. They stay in towns, in communities, and become the bedrock of the entry level workforce when given the opportunity to do so.

I hope you consider these proposals as they will provide Connecticut towns the opportunity to become more equitable, diverse, and welcoming for immigrants and refugees. And these communities will benefit from the rich, family oriented cultures immigrants bring from their home country to our beautiful state.

Thank you for your consideration.



Ann O'Brien
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IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services