

*NOTE: I was signed up to speak (Christine O'Neill), but the 24 hour limit was reached, so I could not. I am instead submitting my testimony in writing.*

My name is Christine O'Neill, and I am speaking in of SB 1024. I am a CAZEO-Certified Zoning Enforcement Technician; I'm the secretary for the Town of Newtown Land Use Department; and I'm earning my Masters of Environmental Management from UConn. My views are my own.

First, I applaud SB 1024's goal of better training our Commissioners. I think we can all agree this is necessary and will improve understand of State land use law, FOIA, and cut down on the number of costly appeals that burden our Towns.

Connecticut needs more housing options. A committee member during yesterday's testimony posited that rentals do not build generational wealth, and therefore continue a cycle of familial poverty. But remember that not every renter fits our historic idea of a family. Connecticut citizens are graduating from college, at 22 years old, carrying tens of thousands of dollars of debt. They are not in any position to buy a starter home, but they *are* the perfect candidates to benefit from multifamily housing, cluster development, or accessory dwelling units. Putting such housing near public transit also cuts down on living costs and is much better for our environment than harmful suburban sprawl. We must furthermore acknowledge that nontraditional families are being served by a highly limited housing stock. We know that now more than ever, couples are choosing not to have children; or single people are choosing not to get married. With this shift, detached single family homes become less broadly desirable. CT's housing stock right now is saturated with this type of structure, which is extremely difficult to afford without a dual income or is simply too large for what a childless couple needs. If we want young people and diverse, nontraditional families to stay in Connecticut, we need options for them besides single family homes.

The other point I'd like to make has to do with the many references to racism that have been brought up throughout these testimonies. A common counterargument I heard is that the exclusionary nature of some zoning policies really comes down to economics and not skin color; as was said, a committee member cannot afford to live in Greenwich no matter what race he identifies as. I challenge you then to ask yourselves this question: Is it really better that zoning is excluding lower-income individuals, as opposed to people of color? Are we okay with the fact that there are extremely limited housing options in certain communities for a struggling single mother or a recent college grad? Whether our zoning policies are excluding minorities or those who have come upon hard times, they still warrant change.

A committee member asked for an example of a discriminatory zoning rule. Here's one: there is simply no reason to have a minimum 3-acre zone. The argument that areas with poor soils need more land for septic systems is already addressed in SB 1024, which calls for the modernization of sewer systems. What it's doing is acting as a minimum *income* zone.

Zoning can be a wonderful planning tool, as it enables us to protect our natural resources and ensure that residential communities are not located near industrial and potentially dangerous uses. But we must face its history of discrimination and start building a Connecticut for all people – even those who cannot afford a single family home.