



TESTIMONY ON SB 1024

**AN ACT CONCERNING ZONING AUTHORITY, CERTAIN DESIGN GUIDELINES,
QUALIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN LAND USE OFFICIALS AND CERTAIN SEWAGE
DISPOSAL SYSTEMS.**

To: Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, & Ranking Member Zullo

From: By: *Maryam Elahi, JD, President of The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut; Rev. Steven Jungkeit, Ph.D. Senior Minister at The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme.*

March 15, 2021

To the Members of the CT General Assembly Planning and Development Committee:

We are writing in support of SB 1024 currently under review with the Planning and Development Committee. We are Maryam Elahi, President of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, and Steve Jungkeit, Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. Together, we have been working to address long standing patterns of racial injustice in various towns along the Connecticut Shoreline, through the Old Saybrook March for Justice and its sister organization, the Lyme/Old Lyme Partnership for Social Justice. One of the principal challenges we're confronting has to do with the pattern of segregation that has made both of our towns largely inaccessible to people of color and to those with limited economic means. Much of that inaccessibility has to do with zoning regulations in our towns. Indeed, that's true throughout Connecticut, which has one of the most segregated populations in the entire country. Along with DesegregateCT, we're hoping to change that.

Affordable housing in our towns is exceedingly scarce - in Old Saybrook and Old Lyme, but also in other towns as well, such as Essex, Deep River, Lyme, and East Lyme. In Old Lyme and Old Saybrook, no multifamily housing is allowed as-of-right; accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are as-of-right only in Old Saybrook and must be attached to the primary dwelling. Between the two towns, Old Saybrook has the greatest stock of affordable units at 2.8% of its total housing stock, which is only to say that more units are urgently needed. That need can be met in a number of different ways, including partnering with local housing agencies to build affordable units within our towns. But there are other ways as well, among them permitting all ADUs as-of-right, embracing Transit-Oriented Development, and bringing more housing opportunities to our Main

Streets. DesegregateCT has been working to advance each of these important reforms that will improve our towns.

Old Saybrook has a thriving Main Street, it has a train station, and there are many properties and detached garages that could be converted into ADUs. We support that legislation that will allow 50% of the land within a half mile of Old Saybrook's Station to allow multifamily housing as-of-right. We also support the Main Street provision which will create greater density downtown by allowing 2-4 family housing within a five minute walk or quarter mile. In each case, we know that Old Saybrook will benefit economically from such reforms, and we also believe they will create greater opportunities for people of all income levels to benefit from the abundant resources that Old Saybrook has to offer. These proposals enable the creation of more housing, lowering housing costs for everyone and increasing community prosperity.

Smaller towns like Old Lyme will also benefit from the proposed reforms. While it is not a transportation hub, Old Lyme's zoning restrictions mean that few people outside of a particular income bracket can afford to live there. Allowing residents to convert existing portions of their homes, or freestanding buildings on their property, into ADUs will help to make Old Lyme's educational and cultural resources available to a wider portion of the state's population. ADUs also create the diverse housing that young people want - something Old Lyme desperately needs going forward. Allowing for new housing, together with similar reforms to zoning regulations, will go a long way toward increasing the economic, racial, and cultural diversity of Old Lyme.

What is true in Old Saybrook and Old Lyme is true across Connecticut. We have organized marches and rallies in towns throughout the Shoreline, and have attended a great many other marches throughout the state. With few exceptions, each and every town we have visited is plagued by the same gaping inequalities that we see in our own communities. Speaking personally, it is discouraging and dispiriting for both of us to encounter the pattern of exclusion that has resulted from restrictive zoning laws. Clearly, systemic and statewide change is needed in order to break the status quo that has made communities such as ours limited to wealthy and predominantly white individuals. We therefore urge the Planning and Development Committee, and, consequently, the General Assembly, to adopt the reforms that DesegregateCT and SB 1024 propose. These proposals are the first step toward making towns throughout Connecticut more hospitable, more humane, more compassionate, and more inclusive.

Thank you for your consideration.

With respect,

Maryam Elahi, JD
President
The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut

Rev. Steven Jungkeit, Ph.D.
Senior Minister
The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme