

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Matthew Resseger, Boston University's Metropolitan College

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:

I am testifying to the positive impact that SB 1024 would have on ameliorating racial segregation in Connecticut based on my own academic research on the impact of zoning on segregation. My work uses the tools of empirical economics to quantify the impacts of land use restrictions such as prohibitions on multi-family zoning and minimum lot size restrictions on racial segregation.¹

Using detailed spatial data available for all municipalities in neighboring Massachusetts I investigate the impact of zoning regulation on residential location patterns by race. Capitalizing on the geographic detail in the data, I focus on variation in the racial composition of neighborhoods within narrow bands around zoning district borders within jurisdictions. By narrowing the geographic focus to zoning boundaries within cities and towns, I am comparing areas offering the same local government, local public goods, and taxes, that differ only in the types of structures allowable by right under the zoning code.

My results imply a large role for local zoning regulation, particularly the permitting of multi-family housing, in explaining disparate racial location patterns in Massachusetts. Blocks zoned for multi-family housing have Black population shares 3.36 percentage points higher and Hispanic population shares 5.77 percentage points higher than single-family zoned blocks directly across a zoning district boundary from them. My results for Massachusetts suggest removing variation in local zoning regulations could move the Boston area from roughly the 75th percentile to the 50th percentile nationally on the racial dissimilarity index for Black residents, a commonly used measure of racial segregation.

While these results come from Massachusetts rather than Connecticut, they are likely to translate well to the Connecticut context. Both states share similar levels of urbanization, with dense urban areas ringed by suburbs with stringent land use regulations. The major metropolitan areas of both states are highly segregated, with the Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford MSA (56.3), the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk MSA (56.2), and the New Haven-Milford MSA (54.4), all ranking just behind the Boston area (57.6) on the racial dissimilarity index for Black residents.² The type of fine-grained comprehensive land use data that I utilize in my Massachusetts study has recently been made available for Connecticut through the Connecticut Zoning Atlas, which catalogs zoning regulations for all 2,622 zoning districts in the state. Analysis by Sara C. Bronin finds that buildings housing three or more families are permitted as-

¹ Resseger, Matthew., The Impact of Land Use Regulation on Racial Segregation: Evidence from Massachusetts Zoning Borders (November 26, 2013). Available at https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/resseger/files/resseger_jmp_11_25.pdf

² Glaeser, Edward. L. and Jacob L. Vigdor (2012). The end of the segregated century: Racial separation in America's neighborhoods, 1890-2010. Manhattan Institute Civic Report 66.

of-right on only 2.5 percent of land in the state, and that there is a strong correlation between areas that permit multi-family housing and areas with large shares of residents of color.³

The results of my study measure the impact of zoning restrictions over the long run, from the establishment of these land use restrictions in the middle of the 20th century to their impact on residential segregation in 2010. Likewise, changes such as the proposed SB 1024 would take time to begin to unravel the consequences of the long history of exclusionary zoning in Connecticut. New market rate multi-family housing is more expensive than older buildings, and the initial residents of new buildings are more affluent and whiter than residents of multi-family housing overall. It takes time for the relaxation of zoning constraints to translate into a sizable increase in the construction of new multi-family residences, and time again for that new supply to translate into increased affordability in the broader rental stock. But the fact that increasing affordability and decreasing racial segregation may not emerge overnight as a result of this legislation is not a reason to hesitate in moving forward with the current bill. In fact, the opposite is true. Restrictive land use regulations have helped to create a divided Connecticut and continue to this day to push the state in the direction of enduring segregation. Only by breaking down these legal barriers can Connecticut begin to move towards a more inclusive future for all of its residents. SB 1024 offers Connecticut the opportunity to take that vital first step, and I urge you to approve it without delay.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

³ Bronin, Sara C., Exclusion, Control, and Consequence in 2,622 Zoning Districts (February 24, 2021). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3792544> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3792544>