

Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 1024

To: 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

From: Luke Reynolds

Date: March 14, 2021

Re: Testimony on SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify before the state legislature. As a proud resident of West Hartford and the Deputy Coordinator of DesegregateCT, I am immensely proud to testify in support of SB 1024.

Eight months ago, as a law student at the University of Connecticut, I started volunteering with DesegregateCT hoping to make a difference in my community. Today, I am proud and hopeful that the reforms in SB 1024 will make the state that I was born and raised in more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous.

Connecticut is great because of its cities and towns, its natural resources, and—most of all—its people. It's a place that pulled me back from living in Seattle, where I developed affordable housing and managed homeless shelters. I came back home to attend law school, which meant taking out student loans and living with my parents in West Hartford for well over a year until I could find roommates and an affordable place to live. In Connecticut, many people my age do not have the opportunity to move back to the communities they grew up in as they pursue their studies or career. The lack of affordable, diverse, and abundant housing options has stagnated our ability to attract young talent and grow the towns that are being dated by our inability to change.

The DesegregateCT coalition – and movement – has been one of my proudest experiences as a resident of this state. Since July, I have worked alongside local leaders, architects, planners, GIS professionals, lawyers, students, and community activists to develop the series of proposals in SB 1024. With what started as a group of about two-dozen dedicated volunteers, we looked at how restrictive zoning laws lock inequity into our communities. We listened to dozens and dozens of communities, book clubs, and neighborhood groups in different parts of the state. We developed the first-of-its kind [Zoning Atlas](#) and observed that the majority of districts in our state predominantly or exclusively zone for single-family housing, and that much of it prevents higher density housing of two, three, or four units. We saw from our mapping how greater racial diversity and income equality existed in communities that allowed multifamily housing. We analyzed studies finding Fairfield County the most economically segregated place in the country, and with the highest wage gap. We learned that a child born in Westport has a life expectancy

nineteen years longer than that of a child born in Bridgeport – just 10 miles away. We read impact studies that linked ADUs and higher density housing to increased property values. We hosted public events and conversations about how zoning policies can both generate economic activity *and* increase affordability and equity. And most importantly, we came to understand and then share that our zoning laws are not preordained, and that they can and must change to reflect the inclusive and sustainable Connecticut we all want to see. It is a proud moment today to bear witness to the overwhelming support for zoning reform, backed by the dynamic and well-researched proposals in this bill.

Other states face similar challenges and have enacted zoning reforms to address such inequities. Our fellow New England states, like Massachusetts and Vermont, passed TOD reforms similar to those in the bill. In California, ADUs were legalized as a policy to close housing gaps, and now ADUs are developing at an incredibly rapid pace to meet housing demand. The reforms in SB 1024 are common-sense legislative initiatives that have been passed on a bipartisan basis in several other states. We can add Connecticut to that list.

SB 1024 is crafted to be impactful, and it strikes a critical balance between much-needed progress and respect for local control and knowledge. While enabling upzoning for multifamily housing in certain areas, the legislation empowers localities to determine exactly where this upzoning occurs, as well as to implement design guidelines to ensure that new construction is compatible with existing architectural character. It adds a model form-based code that towns can choose to adopt and modify at great cost savings to design their communities' years in advance, and allow for more diverse housing types. It requires that local land use commissioners are trained on fair housing, the importance of affordable housing, and burdensome zoning processes so that they will have the knowledge to make local decisions that positively impact generations. At the center of every proposal in our bill is the acknowledgement that municipal governments should make decisions that are best for their residents.

The patterns of segregation in our state make the swift adoption and implementation of SB 1024 essential. We have seen the consequences of our current land use regime reverberate across generations, as children who grow up in low-income, segregated neighborhoods make less money and pursue higher education at lower rates than those who grow up in integrated neighborhoods. If we allow housing where it is desired – near transit stations and main streets – and unlock new types of housing – ADUs and multifamily – we can increase housing supply to meet the overwhelming demand that is driving up prices and excluding whole categories of people from our state. This is important for young individuals, in similar situations to myself, who want to move back to Connecticut but struggle to afford a home in their community.

My ability to grow up in West Hartford has shaped who I am. It provided me with a quality education, vibrant community life, and life-long friends. But if we continue down this path of restrictive zoning, communities like mine will continue to foster historic racial disparities, prove unaffordable to our seniors, and remain out of reach for young people like me.

We must meet this urgent moment with action. SB 1024 makes Connecticut better, and I hope you vote in favor of it.

Sincerely,

Luke Reynolds

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