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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](mailto:pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov)

By: *Jenny Schuetz, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution*  
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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 this opportunity to offer testimony on SB 1024.

I am a Senior Fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings, a non-partisan think tank based in Washington DC. I am an expert in urban economics and housing policy, focusing particularly on housing affordability. I have written extensively on how land use regulations affect housing prices and new development. Most relevant to SB 1024, I recently co-authored a [report](#)—Zoned Out: Why Massachusetts Needs to Legalize Apartments Near Transit—on the pressing need for zoning reforms that allow moderate density housing near transit.

Our report identifies three central problems associated with restrictive zoning policies that limit housing production. First, restrictive zoning leads to high housing costs, which in turn impedes regional labor markets, making it harder for employers to hire and retain workers. Second, limiting housing development near job centers and public transit leads more workers to undertake long-distance solo car commutes, worsening traffic and creating harmful environmental impacts. Third, exclusionary zoning by affluent, mostly white communities exacerbates regional racial and economic segregation, limiting Black and Latino families' access to high-opportunity communities.

Given these high costs, our report recommends regional and statewide interventions—similar to the transit-oriented development proposal in SB 1024—to facilitate residential development near transit. Statewide intervention is necessary because the costs associated with restrictive zoning extend far beyond the borders of any one municipality, distorting regional labor markets, driving up emissions, and entrenching residential segregation.

To overcome these challenges, we highlight the benefits of allowing moderate density housing near transit, including rowhouses, duplexes, and multifamily apartments. Our analysis finds three key benefits of higher density housing near transit. First, we found that new multifamily housing

would improve housing affordability, especially in the most expensive communities. New multifamily development near commuter rail stations would produce homes that are affordable to households earning under \$100,000 in Wellesley and Needham, two high opportunity suburbs with median incomes in excess of \$150,000. Second, this increased affordability would permit greater socioeconomic diversity in high opportunity areas. Third, we found that increased housing stock can relieve displacement pressures regionwide, by creating new opportunities for market-rate renters and voucher holders.

While our report focused on neighboring Massachusetts, Connecticut faces similar if not greater challenges. Data compiled in the DesegregateCT Zoning Atlas shows that less than 2% of land statewide in “primarily residential” zones allows for four-unit housing as of right. By comparison, over 99% of land in those zones allows single-family homes as of right. As in Massachusetts, huge swaths of land near Connecticut’s transit stations and commercial corridors only allow for single-family homes. Our research suggests that statewide policies to allow transit-oriented development can help curb the most excessive density restrictions in high opportunity areas.

In early 2021, the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill requiring municipalities to zone for medium-density transit-oriented development. Notably, this bill passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by a Republican governor. Though Massachusetts has a robust tradition of home rule, state lawmakers of all political stripes recognized the economic, environmental, and social benefits of transit-oriented development and the need for state action—while giving municipalities flexibility to determine how to revise their zoning codes to comply. This is very similar to the approach proposed in SB 1024, which would require medium density zoning near transit, while affording municipalities the opportunity to determine where to site that density.

Thank you for your consideration.