



Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Reed Schwartz, and I am a Middletown resident and Policy Director for the Wesleyan Democrats. I am writing to urge members of the committee to support SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems. SB1024 would be a serious step forward in the fights against climate change, displacement, skyrocketing rents, and sprawl, and would increase Connecticut's tax base as we recover from this recession.

My great-grandparents, Eastern European Jews, escaped to New York City in the early 1900s, fleeing poverty and persecution in their home countries and seeking a better life in this one. Though they faced hardship here, including normalized anti-semitism and the greatest economic depression in the history of this country, my grandfather was able to grow up in the heart of the City, surrounded by other immigrants and the educational opportunities he needed to eventually become a tenured professor. If they had made the journey today, I can't say that the outcome would have been the same. We used to allow dense construction in this country, cheap housing that allowed immigrants like my great-grandparents to embed themselves in the economy and culture, yet today, rising rents artificially inflated by rent seeking landowners and their zoning regimes have locked low wage workers and immigrants in low opportunity, car dependent suburbs. SB 1024 is a significant movement in ameliorating that exclusion, one that will begin to restore the economic mobility that allowed my great-grandparents and their children to thrive here.

Just like the rest of the United States, the history of Connecticut's land usage is deeply rooted in systemic racism and intentional exclusion of people of color. Redlining,¹ "urban renewal"², and racial covenants³ all actively hamstrung the attempts of families of color to generate wealth to the tune of trillions of dollars, and though the Fair Housing Act remedied some of these injustices, their modern descendants—including, but not limited to, exclusionary and low density zoning, onerous permitting requirements, and excessive opportunities for rent seekers to block new construction—live on today.⁴ SB 1024 will begin to address this legacy by attacking exclusionary zoning head on, and though it is not comprehensive, is a significant advancement. For Connecticut lawmakers to proclaim to support the

¹ <https://www.wnpr.org/post/what-redlining-did-connecticuts-impoverished-neighborhoods>

² https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hpd_1102_hoffman.pdf

³ <https://connecticuthistory.org/race-restrictive-covenants-in-property-deeds/>

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Black Lives Matter movement without beginning to redress the state's history of exclusion through pro-housing legislation would be hypocrisy of the highest degree.

In addition, SB 1024 will reduce sprawl, removing the pressure on our green spaces by encouraging dense and efficient construction in vibrant, walkable neighborhoods. New multifamily housing and ADUs will be more efficient, both to heat and to commute from, and will relieve some of the burden of high rents imposed by an artificially constricted supply. There is no reason to develop new areas when there is so much empty space lying vacant above our heads, nor to plan around cars instead of people.

To be clear, SB 1024 will not solve problems like racial inequity, housing instability, or environmental degradation; and though it is a serious step in the right direction, subsequent legislation must build on its provisions, by increasing funding for mass transit and bicycle infrastructure, instituting parking maximums, increasing fuel taxes as well as taxing Vehicle Miles Travelled⁵, and tightening environmental standards on appliances and heating in new construction, among others. However, in the short term, SB 1024 is a fantastic opportunity to make Connecticut a more prosperous and inclusive state.

For these reasons, I ask and encourage all members of the Connecticut General Assembly to vote in favor of SB 1024.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
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⁵ <https://static.tti.tamu.edu/tti.tamu.edu/documents/PRC-2016-2.pdf>