



**Testimony of**  
**Roger Senserrich Communications Director**  
**Connecticut Working Families Organization**

**March 11, 2021**

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Roger Senserrich, and I am the Communications Director at CT Working Families Organization. We're an anti-racist, multi-racial, progressive political organization that builds power for working people.

We stand in support of S.B. 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems. This legislation will expand access to affordable housing, reducing residential segregation, and improving land use across the state.

Connecticut working families are struggling with a housing affordability crisis. This was the case before the pandemic led to an influx of homebuyers from New York to our towns, and it will only grow more pronounced in the coming years. One in five households in Fairfield county face severe housing cost burdens, that is, spending more than half of their income on housing. New Haven (18 percent) and Hartford (16 percent) are not far behind<sup>1</sup>. Connecticut ranks eighth nationally in housing costs<sup>2</sup>; although we are behind some of our neighboring states (notably New York), this represents a significant challenge for many state residents.

To make matters worse, affordable housing in our state is not just unevenly distributed, but segregated by race and income. After decades of redlining, discriminatory lending practices, regressive property tax policies, and exclusionary zoning practices, Connecticut has seen municipalities split between high-tax, low-property value cities and inner ring suburbs and low-tax, expensive suburbs and exurbs. Because access to education remains so closely tied to where a child lives in our state, this has a severe impact on access to opportunity, especially for children of color.

Persistent residential segregation is what sustains racial and economic injustice in the United States<sup>3</sup>. Taking steps to address these must be a priority in Connecticut.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/connecticut/2020/measure/factors/154/data](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/connecticut/2020/measure/factors/154/data)

<sup>2</sup> [worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/cost-of-living-index-by-state](http://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/cost-of-living-index-by-state)

<sup>3</sup> [www.brookings.edu/essay/trend-1-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods-are-sustaining-racial-and-economic-injustice-in-the-us/](http://www.brookings.edu/essay/trend-1-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods-are-sustaining-racial-and-economic-injustice-in-the-us/)

S.B. 1024 takes some steps to alleviate the housing crisis in Connecticut. By allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right, this legislation would enable the construction of new housing across the state, to the benefit of both homeowners and renters. These new units would provide not only more affordable housing in wealthier neighborhoods, but also give more options for new and current residents in urban areas that have seen an influx of new residents.

In addition, S.B. 1024 places some limits on some of the most egregious practices used by some municipalities to actively block new housing developments, be it affordable or otherwise. Minimum floor areas, parking requirements, or “town character” regulations have been routinely exploited in many jurisdictions to actively exclude low-income residents and people of color. We would encourage the committee to strengthen some of these clauses to facilitate new construction, especially around transit facilities.

Besides the urgent need to support working families and create opportunities for families of color, it is important to stress the fact that facilitating and expanding access to housing across the state will have very significant, positive effects on economic growth. Suppressing the supply of housing, like many communities in Connecticut have done for decades, leads to widespread economic harm. Much has been said about Connecticut’s population loss in recent years; the extremely high cost of housing, especially in the regions of our state that are the most vibrant and dynamic, has a lot to do with it. High housing prices is a policy choice. S.B. 1024 is an important first step to create new alternatives, and attract new residents and new businesses to the state.

Much more needs to be done to end housing segregation in the state, from ending limits to multi-family home construction to promoting denser mixed development close to transit nodes, to expanded housing subsidies for families in need.

This bill is a first step. I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support S.B. 1024 this session.

Thank you for your time,

**Roger Senserrich**

*Communications Director*

*Working Families Organization, CT*