

**SENATOR DEREK SLAP**

Fifth District

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**State of Connecticut**  
SENATE

Chair  
Aging Committee  
Vice Chair  
Environment Committee  
Member  
Education Committee  
Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee  
Government, Administration and Elections  
Committee

March 15, 2021

Thank you Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy-Vahey, ranking members Senator Hwang and Representative Zullo - and all members of the Planning & Development committee for allowing me to testify today in support of Senate Bill 1024.

I believe this bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation being considered by the General Assembly this year.

There may be no other bill that addresses racial inequality, strengthens our economy, protects our environment, helps Connecticut attract and retain younger workers, and lowers the cost of housing for everyone all at the same time.

Last summer, Connecticut raised the Black Lives Matter flag over the state capitol in response to nationwide protests for racial equity. Many lawmakers, myself included, promised that we would do what we could to ensure that the summer of 2020 would be more than a moment; that it would be a movement.

This is our chance to make good on that promise.

In a Time piece about the importance of neighborhoods in the conversation of racial equality, the CEO of the realty company Redfin, Glen Kellman, wrote, "almost every improvement in racial justice that we can imagine, in wealth, education, opportunity, attitudes, and empathy, starts at home... We can't expect to think of one another as equals, or even to understand one another at all, when we go to different schools, streets and stores. We can't raise our fists at a Black Lives Matter protest, then return to an all-white neighborhood."

The Realtor Code of Ethics, from 1925 – 1950, forbade "introducing into a neighborhood... members of any race whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values."

And this happened often around the country, including our state. A recent article in the Hartford Courant described in detail how this occurred in West Hartford and Bloomfield - both towns which I represent. Those overtly racist policies have changed but Black home ownership has not. The number of black home owners is the same as it was in 1968, about half of that of white Americans.

And in Connecticut the majority of the Black population is still concentrated in just a handful of communities.

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It does not have to be this way.

The Urban Institute reports that, "zoning can encourage inclusion, create opportunity, protect open spaces, and prevent truly incompatible land uses from sharing the same space. When done thoughtfully, zoning can connect people and places, not just divide us."

The power of NIMBY-ism is strong – especially in Connecticut. There have been disinformation campaigns alleging that the legislature will eliminate all local control and would create drastic changes to towns that our residents love and call home. But this bill will not take away what makes our towns incredible, it will just allow us to share those towns with more of our state's residents.

My hope is that people will listen, learn and try to understand the true cost that these restrictive zoning ordinances have on our children and our state.

Put aside for a moment that our existing zoning regulations often perpetuate racism and all its pernicious impacts. The current system not only makes us all weaker, but also raises the cost of housing, drives away young workers, increases sprawl and undermines the economy.

One report in California showed that each zoning regulation increased cost of rent by 2 percent and home prices by 4 percent. If we want to increase the chances that our grandchildren will stay in Connecticut, we need to take this seriously.

This bill would make sense even if there was no person of color living in Connecticut; but because we do have people of color living in CT, it makes it not only the smart thing to do, but the right thing to do.

Thankfully, we are blessed with diversity. And this bill can help bring us together.

As Mr. Kellman says, "The country often talks about making a place for real change, as if the only place that needs to exist is in our hearts. But the place for real change is an actual place. It's where we live."

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derek Slap".

Senator Derek Slap