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State of Connecticut
SENATE

DEPUTY SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

RANKING MEMBER
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
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MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
EXEC. & LEGIS. NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

March 15, 2021

Testimony in Opposition to:

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

By Senator Heather Somers

Chair Cassano, Chair McCarthy Vahey and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Some people believe that the state knows better than local municipalities. I could not disagree more. As a former Mayor, and as someone who puts a priority on environmental issues, I can assure you that the state does *not* know best.

Senate Bill 1024 would have the state manage and dictate local governance: A clear violation of Home Rule. Why would we erode, undermine, and muzzle our local governing boards? We should trust these volunteers to make local zoning guidelines and standards in their towns. This bill would give that high impact decision-making power of our neighborhoods to faceless bureaucrats at a central state government office in Hartford.

If you like your government big, detached, and centrally-run, you should vote for this bill.

This bill would enable state government to place restrictions on local governments' ability to regulate land usage and limit residents' say in what gets built in their town and how. It represents an utter disregard for the planning, coordination, and decision-making that went into the creation of local ordinances.

If you like Big Brother-style government which doesn't value the voice of the people, you should vote for this bill.

We need creative, sustainable solutions to address critical housing needs in our state. These challenges are faced by cities, suburbs, and rural areas as well. I represent many of those rural towns in eastern Connecticut. But this bill is not the solution to those needs. It raises concerns about its potential negative impact on environmental protection, wetlands, conservation, open space, wildlife and natural habitats. It also raises questions about its impact on sewer and septic systems, established neighborhoods, historic areas, as well as watershed protection areas.

And what about local infrastructure issues? Many of the rural towns I represent have very little infrastructure to speak of. Where would this bill leave them?

And what about accountability? State government-controlled zoning would mean that there would be no local accountability for decisions affecting towns -and their local economies - for generations.

As someone who appreciates that we have pressing housing needs in our state, we should continue to have this conversation. Part of a productive conversation involves listening – listening to the people at the local level. They know best. This bill silences local voices. We simply cannot "blow up" local control, as this bill would most definitely do. Vote no on SB 1024.