

**TO: CT General Assembly Planning and Development Committee**  
**FROM: Samantha Sondik, Bolton**  
**RE: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials, and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems**  
**Date: March 15th, 2021**

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

Thank you to the committee for considering and hearing testimony on SB 1024. I strongly commend those among you who are willing to have debate and public hearings on such important issues.

My name is Samantha Sondik, and I am a junior at Bolton High School. I was unaware of the zoning inequities in this state and in my own hometown until I began to volunteer with DesegregateCT. This organization opened my eyes to the inequity within our laws and the need for serious legislation combating zonal segregation. I've lived in Bolton for 17 years, and after using their zoning atlas, I was shocked to find that my rural, small town has built an infrastructure that makes moving here and developing a home extremely difficult for low-income people. Since that day, I have been dedicated to joining in this fight for equity in housing.

On the surface, Bolton is a lovely, historic town with a great school system. Deeper, however, lies a feeling of walls-up isolationism. Bolton's laws make affordable and manageable housing almost impossible. Hence why the majority of our residents live in single-family houses on several acres of land. Our town has restricted fast food restaurants and drive-throughs, making it more difficult to get cheaper food. These rules have the effect of shutting out modernization and diversity. As a result, Bolton's population is 93.9% white. Our zoning laws work to *keep* Bolton with a lack of diversity and affordability, allowing only the middle and upper classes to stick around (median household income: \$104,000 in 2019).

I can't tell you how many of my friends have told me their parents moved here *because* Bolton was not very diverse. Instead of saying they support segregation in zoning and education, they call it *safer* or *a better environment for schooling*, which is really code for *whiter*. This is the result of generations of keeping everybody else out using the law. Implementing fair housing and zoning laws would mean bringing more diversity to my small town that desperately needs a culture shock. Many of my classmates have no idea what diversity really means. How can we learn life skills and become adults without being exposed to the real world? The School of Teaching at American University reported findings that diversity in the classroom improved students' creativity, cognitive skills, and critical thinking. It can be inferred that diversity helps adults with these skills, too. By depriving students of all races the chance to live and learn in diverse settings, Connecticut is also depriving students of important educational experiences. This, of course, is not to mention physical inequities within Connecticut's school system: fewer textbooks, teachers, and after-school programs for students in low-income school districts.

In reality, housing is the first obstacle to real equality in society. Where you live and how you live affects education, taxes, jobs, and so on. Solving racial injustice must begin with our most basic and fundamental rights to property and housing. It has been an honor to speak to so many residents in this state that feel the same way. To hear others' stories of injustice in their

own towns and cities, from rural Litchfield and Tolland counties, to cities like Greenwich and Bridgeport, has convinced me that this state has a lot of much needed work to do.

The most interesting of the bill's proposals, in my opinion, is the section on transit-oriented development. Public transportation is cost-effective, helps protect the environment from carbon dioxide emissions, and is particularly essential to those who cannot afford a personal vehicle. Increasing housing in areas that have public transit would improve the lives of so many people who cannot afford to drive a long commute to work each morning. This is one of the first steps towards equity-- creating the ability for people to get transportation, despite their income or where they live.

SB 1024 takes the first steps to combat zoning and housing inequality in Connecticut. To pass this bill would be to pursue the first steps to racial and income equality before the law. It is essential that all people in Connecticut have an equal chance at success and happiness.

I, along with my fellow members of DesegregateCT, members of the state legislature, and residents of Connecticut, urge our leaders to pass SB 1024 and secure the promises of equality for all.