

My name is Tim Vilinskis, I am a resident of Ridgefield, and I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB 1024. I have professional experience as a homebuilder and developer, I am a former board member of the Builders Association of the Hudson Valley, a co-founder of the Hudson Valley Smart-Growth Alliance, and a graduate of the Community Leadership Alliance Program sponsored by Pace University's Land Use Law Center.

I would like to start by saying that I actually support, at least in principle, the seven elements in the Desegregate CT platform. Developing model zoning codes, model parking standards, revising design guidelines for onsite decentralized waste water systems, and requiring training for planning and zoning commissioners are all reasonable. I support the concept of ADU's, TOD, and Main Street planning, but feel that a prescriptive one size fits all approach mandated by the state is a mistake and will undoubtedly lead to adverse outcomes and conflict. The proper role for the state should be collaborating with towns by providing planning expertise and incentives to help them develop housing solutions that seamlessly integrate into the fabric of the many different communities that dot the Connecticut landscape. Localities with their deep well of local knowledge are in the best position to develop and implement these policies. Yes, it is a slower more incremental approach to rolling back restrictions on housing than a sweeping state diktat, but it is the wiser one.

Desegregate CT has done a terrific job raising awareness about affordable housing in the few short months of its existence. I do not think it is fully understood how this sea change in public opinion will enable local leaders to develop specific and effective local strategies to build a diverse housing stock. For instance, Ridgefield has recently revised its current ADU regulation to allow two bedroom ADU's, as-of-right, throughout the town. The town, in effect, no longer has single-family zoning. At the adoption of the new ordinance, it was emphasized if unexpected adverse results arise, the ordinance can quickly be changed. This is simply not possible with state law. For example the 8-30(g) law is rife with defects, lack of design guidelines and arbitrary thresholds, that have not been addressed. We also have a TOD plan for the Branchville train station, however development has stalled due to the lack of sewerage. It is with infrastructure obstacles like this that the state could be most helpful. We have also seen quite a bit of 8-30(g) building in town, some good, some not so good. I believe other towns are making similar progress in addressing affordable housing with strategies that suit their individual communities. It is simply premature for the state to preempt this long-standing traditional process by disenfranchising local stakeholders.

Affordable housing is just one part of a much bigger picture. The state should stay focused on its core responsibilities.

It needs to re-imagine education for our urban areas. The current model of being assigned to a school based on where you live is unsuited for 21<sup>st</sup> century cities. It was very disappointing to see the Stamford Charter School for Excellence (one of the highest performing schools in the state) having to drop its pre-k program and wonder if it will be able to continue educating its scholars through the 8th grade. Also, the failure to fund the Danbury Prospect charter school was a bitter disappointment to the Latino community. It seems there are still people in this state that are more interested in preserving the existing power structure of the public education system than achieving excellent outcomes for children of color.

The state needs to make sure people have opportunity, which makes improving the business climate to encourage job growth essential. Without a good job housing will always be unaffordable. That means addressing the malignant unfunded liability crisis that has created some of the highest tax burdens in the country and crowded out investment in essential services.

Lastly, the state needs to be mindful, as Rep. McGee stated, in a recent Housing committee public hearing, of the “individuals who are choosing to remain where they live” by reinvesting in and growing our cities. This should be our focus, not directing scarce resources to suburban development.

Tim Vilinskis

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