

To: CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

From: Daisy Wang/Norwich, CT

Re: SB 1024, An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications Of Certain Land Use Officials And Certain Sewage Disposal Systems

Date: March 15, 2021

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

I am writing to you all to encourage you to support SB 1024. I strongly believe that the zoning reforms in SB 1024 will positively impact communities across Connecticut, including racial equity, affordable housing, the environment, and the local economy. Our current housing and zoning policies disproportionately affect people of color and low-income populations. If we want to work towards a more inclusive state, it is essential to expand housing diversity, increase housing supply, and improve the development process to create a more inclusive state.

My family immigrated to Norwich, CT, in the early 1990s and were fortunate enough to live in a multi-housing movement initially. However, this kind of housing is not guaranteed in every area in Connecticut. Most areas in Connecticut are still exclusive to 1-family housing with additional challenging requirements such as owning multiple acres of land or minimum lot size requirements. For this reason, many BIPOC populations tend to concentrate in specific urban areas, such as Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, New London, and other cities, as these are the only places that offer diverse housing options. At the same time, it's extremely difficult to have access to resources such as quality air and water, grocery stores, well-funded schools, and other detrimental living factors.

Growing up in Norwich, CT, with a BIPOC population of 39%, I have witnessed and experienced first-hand how the current housing system affected my public school experiences. According to a report by the Connecticut Voices for Children, they demonstrated that when there are more restrictions on the construction of multi-family housing, towns are more exclusionary—residents are wealthier, schools have more funding, and the student body within schools is whiter. Students in towns with fewer zoning restrictions also experience larger student-teacher ratios and less per-pupil funding and thus do not receive the same educational opportunities as students in towns that restrict multi-family housing construction.¹ Since Norwich is one of the places in Connecticut with fewer zoning restrictions, I did not receive the same educational opportunities as other students in Connecticut from wealthier areas. For

¹ https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Separate-and-Unequal_Just-Facts-Final.pdf

example, at Teachers Memorial Middle School, due to budget cuts, our language program was cut, many afterschool programs were reduced, and our band program was eventually phased out. These are all programs that are essential to how students' development. Furthermore, only eight teachers in each grade had to accommodate a class size of approximately 160 students. This creates an unfair ratio of 1:20 where teachers cannot adequately pay attention and accommodate all students.

I am currently a junior in college, but I still remember the effects of having these programs cut and feeling dread and uncertainty about consolidating with the other local middle schools. Since then, both middle schools in my district have consolidated, creating an even higher disproportionate teacher-to-student ratio. It is extremely unjust that students who happen to live in these districts must live with these uncertainties. Public education is only one area that demonstrates how Connecticut is highly segregated based on high levels of income inequality.

As a result, we need to adopt zoning reforms in SB 1024. Change needs to happen now, as the current processes harmfully affect many communities and individuals. SB 1024 is one of the first steps to Desegregating Connecticut, creating more abundant and diverse housing and creating a more inclusive state with more opportunities for all. I strongly support the zoning reforms in SB 1024 as they will positively change Connecticut.