

*To:* CT General Assembly Planning & Development Committee

*From:* Ben Wenograd, Member West Hartford Town Council

*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:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I am a member of the West Hartford Town Council and I strongly support this legislation.

I recently led a successful three-year effort to replace an archaic and frankly embarrassing ADU regulation (it actually carved out an exception for “servants”), with new guidelines very similar to the ones contained in this bill. We brought in experts, studied resources from organizations ranging from the AARP to the conservative Mercator think tank, held multiple committee meetings, took in written and verbal testimony from the public, and eventually passed the change.

We have now provided an opportunity for seniors to age in place more easily, for new residents to afford to move to town, and for families to arrange transitional care for those who need more independence than allowed in a typical single-family home. We ended the effective prohibition on these uses for all of our single-family zones, despite a wide range of lot sizes, giving our residents the freedom to improve their homes in this way without undue interference from the government. And they don’t need to have servants to exercise these rights.

This is not the end of our work. Last month, the Town Council unanimously approved creation of an Affordable Housing Advisory

Group, and I look forward to their suggestions. The work of making our community stronger and more diverse must continue.

Although in the end opposition to allowing ADU's was very limited, I am well aware of the arguments against any changes to zoning regulations and to the fear of losing "local control". As to the first, given what I hope is the universal acknowledgement of the racist and classist roots of much of zoning law, I believe we must review and re-justify zoning regulations to make sure they are still defensible exercises of government power. What concerned the drafters of zoning rules in the 1920's simply doesn't help much in determining what is appropriate today, and in the case of ADU's I believe their fears are no longer relevant.

As to the local control issue, we only need to look at the wide disparities in housing access to know that something needs to change. This bill does not take away local zoning authority, it simply creates a reasonable floor to prevent some of the more egregious exercises of local interference with the interests of property owners.

I urge passage of SB 1024.