

**Testimony of
The City of Stamford
in Support of SB 666,
AAC Municipal Liens for Accrued Fines and Certain Code Violations
Before the Judiciary Committee
March 17, 2006**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and other esteemed members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of S.B. 666. This bill will provide local governments with a powerful new tool with which to combat a growing and distressing trend in our state – unsafe and substandard apartments endangering the lives of residents, neighbors, and emergency responders.

In Stamford, the problems of overcrowding, illegal rooming houses, illegal occupancy of unsafe cellars and attics, and other severe zoning violations are threatening to overwhelm some of our neighborhoods. Parking, long a local problem in many older neighborhoods, quickly reaches a crisis when units are illegally subdivided. Emergency responders are endangered by unsafe conditions, overcrowding, and congestion. Low and moderate income residents are too often taken advantage of by unscrupulous landlords who increase their rent-rolls at the expense of their tenants' health and safety.

The City of Stamford has been hampered by the ineffectiveness of existing legal recourses for enforcing our zoning code. A property owner found in violation of zoning can temporarily discontinue an illegal use, but restart once legal proceedings have been dropped. The time involved in bringing these matters before the courts means that many issues are moot by the time they are heard. The result is that there is no effective deterrent to property owners who see an opportunity to enrich themselves at the cost of public health and appropriate land use.

SB 666 will not only allow the City to impose stiffer fines, but will also make those fines fully enforceable through the application of liens. The City of Stamford has always been reluctant to use widespread application of fines to solve this or other problems. Indeed, in the case of zoning enforcement we have an amnesty policy in place to ensure that property owners are given ample opportunity to correct violations before severe sanctions or fines are imposed. However, we believe that our ultimate ability to impose significant fines and to collect them through liens is the best way for us to achieve prompt compliance from property owners.

Again, the City of Stamford urges you to support SB 666 and to work for its passage this session.