



CONNECTICUT HOUSING COALITION

30 Jordan Lane · Wethersfield, CT 06109
Telephone: 860-563-2943 · Fax: 860-529-5176
E-mail: info@ct-housing.org · Web: www.ct-housing.org

Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing – March 24, 2006

Testimony of Jeffrey Freiser
Executive Director, Connecticut Housing Coalition

Oppose:
**S.B. 672 – AAC Standards for the Denial
of an Affordable Housing Application**

The Connecticut Housing Coalition is a network of over 250 community-based, affordable housing organizations from across the state. Our membership includes non-profit developers, social service agencies, resident associations, and diverse other housing practitioners and advocates. I was privileged to serve as a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Affordable Housing, which in 1999-2000 conducted a ten-year review of the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure (C.G.S. 8-30g).

Our Coalition urges your rejection of S.B. 672, because it would weaken one of Connecticut's most important affordable housing laws.

Background

In 1989, Connecticut enacted landmark legislation to overcome exclusionary zoning practices. The Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure established a new standard of review for municipal zoning decisions concerning affordable housing.

A developer denied an opportunity to build affordable housing by local authorities may appeal the rejection in court. Under the appeals law, the judge must determine whether the town's reasons for its denial "clearly outweigh the need for affordable housing." In applying this standard, the court respects bona fide objections, such as genuine traffic safety or sewer problems, for turning down a housing proposal. But zoning decisions based on insubstantial or inappropriate reasons aimed at excluding affordable housing are overturned.

Approximately 3,200 units of affordable housing have been produced as a result of this law since its passage. At the same time, the courts have repeatedly decided in favor of towns when their reasons for denial were legitimate.

Housing Needs Remain Severe

Housing is an essential ingredient to Connecticut's future. Housing that is safe, decent and affordable means stable families, thriving children and vibrant neighborhoods. More than that, housing means opportunity, jobs, growth and revenue for our state. Teachers, police and firefighters cannot afford to live in the towns they serve. Our highways are clogged because people cannot afford to live near where they work. Businesses will not choose to locate or expand in Connecticut if their employees cannot afford to live here. Housing is an engine of economic expansion. Housing is where jobs go at night.

Among the indicators of our housing problems:

- A person needs to earn \$19.30 an hour, more than 2½ times the state's minimum wage of \$7.40, to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment in Connecticut.
- Nearly half (294 of 630) of the state's occupations do not provide an income sufficient to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment – including bus drivers, computer operators, construction laborers, EMTs, food service workers, machinists, nursing aides, pre-school teachers, police and fire dispatchers, retail salespersons, reporters, secretaries and tellers.
- On average in Connecticut, someone earning the state minimum wage of \$7.40 an hour would have to work 104 hours a week—2½ full-time jobs—to afford a two-bedroom rental.
- The Stamford-Norwalk metropolitan area is the second costliest rental market in the entire nation, with a “housing wage” of \$28.88 an hour.
- In 2000, the Blue Ribbon Commission calculated that Connecticut had a shortage of 68,000 units of affordable housing – and the situation has gotten worse since then.

Meeting Our Housing Needs

For more than a decade, the legislature has seen contentious debate and countless bills and amendments directed at the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure. The Blue Ribbon Commission managed to forge an effective compromise with broad, bi-partisan support. In 2000, legislation was adopted, based on the Commission's recommendations, which represented a thoughtful, carefully crafted resolution of divergent views about the appeals statute. Towns that have seen significant development under the appeals law are now granted a four-year, renewable moratorium. All towns benefit from more effective tools to review proposals and to enforce standards upon developers. And most important, a greater proportion of housing that is produced is more affordable and for a longer period.

The Blue Ribbon Commission also called upon the State to expand resources available for affordable housing, and to become a more reliable partner with our municipalities and community-based organizations in meeting local housing needs. Our State's financial commitment to housing has significant relevance for the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure. If a town chooses to actively promote affordable housing, it will be able to earn a four-year moratorium or a full exemption from the appeals process.

We strongly encourage towns to establish partnerships with nonprofit housing developers. In this way, a town can spur housing development that best meets its local needs and is most appropriate for the character of the community. Even towns that faced litigation have now come to appreciate and embrace relationships with housing nonprofits – for example, Trumbull’s cooperative efforts with the Mutual Housing Association of Southwestern Connecticut and West Hartford’s work with the West Hartford Interfaith Housing Coalition.

We urge the members of the Judiciary Committee to maintain an effective Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure and not take a step backward in our commitment to fair housing opportunity.