



State of Connecticut  
SENATE

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**Proposed Bill No. 207 – AAC Affordable Housing**  
**Senator Dan Debicella Testimony**  
**February 19, 2009**

Good Morning Chairmen Gomes and Green, Ranking Members McKinney and Miller, and members of the Select Committee on Housing. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill #207, *An Act Concerning Affordable Housing*.

Affordable housing is an important goal for Connecticut, but current laws governing affordable housing, specifically Section 8-30g of the General Statutes, have not been successful. Fewer than 1,000 units of new affordable housing have actually been created since this statute was put in place. Rather than promoting affordable housing, this statute causes a loss of local control and massive legal fees. Today I urge the repeal of Section 8-30g and its replacement by supporting the 2007 Home Connecticut Act. It is time to use the carrot, not the stick, in our affordable housing policy.

We are all familiar with the arguments against Section 8-30g. Little progress has been made in many communities across Connecticut towards our goal of establishing 10% of affordable housing in each town. Our current approach is a punitive one that empowers judges and developers rather than encourage local towns to build affordable housing into their zoning plans.

As you are aware, Section 8-30g of the General Statutes specifically allows developers to sue if they are denied by a town to build developments if a portion of units are classified as affordable housing. The power of implementation is taken out of the hands of our local officials, who have the best idea of how affordable housing should be placed in their communities. Without proper local control, the result is poor zoning and planning, which harms the entire community.

The power to implement affordable housing is being placed more in the hands of private developers and the courts, rather than our local community officials. Private developers use laws like Section 8-30g as a weapon to force their developments on municipalities when they are denied zoning. More often than not, these have resulted in court cases that cost municipalities hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees, money that most certainly would be better spent elsewhere.

Senate Bill #207 proposes to change the way we achieve affordable housing. It would repeal 8-30g, giving each town the final say in where affordable housing goes within their borders. Instead, we should replace this with a set of financial incentives for towns.

We have a better way to promote affordable housing—the Home Connecticut Act. Passed in 2007, this provided \$4 million in funding for planning grants and authorized incentive payments for municipalities (which have not yet been fully funded). Over 43 communities have applied for the planning grants, and to date 32 have received them. OPM expects another 25 towns to apply this year. The program has been a huge success so far—and in better economic times I would support expanding it. However, given the fiscal crisis this year the best we can do is maintain the program's funding. Governor Rell has again funded Home Connecticut at \$4 million for FY2010-11, and I will be working as Ranking Member on the Appropriations Committee to maintain that funding.

I urge the members of the committee to support Senate Bill #207. Let's replace the court-ordered "command-and-control" approach to affordable housing to one of local control, where towns will be able to once again decide where and how affordable housing is developed in their communities—and give them the financial incentives to do so.