



**Testimony of David Fink  
Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities  
To the Appropriations Committee, Feb. 17, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Respected members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is David Fink and I am the policy director of the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide housing policy organization that conducts research, educates and advocates for supportive and affordable housing to serve the needs of the homeless, disabled, very low, low and moderate income residents of our state.

I want to first tell you I am here to support an appropriation for the Community Investment Act. In addition to helping preserve valuable open space, farmland and important historic structures, it provides vital dollars for housing creation. It has funded the Housing Connections effort by LISC and the CT Housing Coalition that has helped more than two dozen communities organize housing creation efforts, and it has provided gap financing for several showcase projects, such as 410 Asylum down at the foot of the Capitol, where mixed-income mixed-use housing will provide dozens of new units for workers in the Hartford.

Now, however, I want to turn my attention to the HOMEConnecticut program. I AM NOT HERE to request a specific appropriation, per se. Rather, I want to briefly update you on the program's wide success and the enormous opportunity it presents to Connecticut.

HOMEConnecticut was enacted by the General Assembly in 2007 to respond to a wide shortage of housing that was affordable to workers, families, young professionals, elderly residents and others in Connecticut. Partly because of that shortage:

- Connecticut has lost a higher percentage of 25-34-year-olds than any state in the nation since 1990
- ¼ of all households are earning less than 80% of median income and spending more than 30% of it on housing
- ¼ of all renters are earning less than 50% of median income and spending more than half of it on housing, and
- Family homelessness has risen 13% in the last year, with the GREAT LIKELIHOOD that number will increase in 2009.

Our state needs housing for workers or businesses will not come, stay or expand here. Cities and towns need housing for municipal workers and volunteers, commercial workers, adult children wishing to come back to the towns they grew up in, young families who will volunteer for town boards and shop in town stores, and so many other reasons.

The good news is that more than 60 towns have or will soon apply for planning and technical assistance grants to plan Incentive Housing Zones under the HOMEConnecticut program. Why is that important? Because those communities have recognized they need more housing options and many, for the first time, are proactively planning their communities. More to the point, many will find they can create housing at higher densities – and, thus, make much of it affordable – at smart growth locations that the town’s residents agree is appropriate.

Which is why I am here tonight. Of those 60 or more towns studying locations, my educated guess is that 40 to 50 will create Incentive Housing Zones some time in the next blennium and come to OPM with applications for incentive grants. That is a huge opportunity for the state: to finally have towns eager to create the homes we need to keep and attract the workforce we need, allow people to live affordably and comfortably, prevent homelessness and enhance our quality of life.

While I understand we are in an era when you on this committee must confront – and fund – many vital needs, I am asking you to consider this **dangerous scenario**:

If towns come forward and are willing to create housing for workers that the state desperately needs – housing such as affordable rentals, townhouses, starter homes that, I might add, the state has failed to produce in the last 20 years -- but OPM is forced to tell them there is no incentive money for them under the statute, the word will spread quickly and the program will stop in its tracks! Towns will stop planning Incentive Housing Zones. The opportunity to create housing supply we now sorely lack will wither.

The bottom line is pretty clear: Having towns develop homes for the workforce we need is a great opportunity. Giving them incentive to do so will help us realize that opportunity, But denying that incentive will make that opportunity vanish.

I am not asking you to create a line item for HOMEConnecticut at this point. But I am asking you to keep housing creation in your thoughts and please weigh the cost of saying “No” to the many towns that want to create the housing Connecticut needs so badly.