

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE
APPROPRIATIONS, HOUSING, AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEES

JOINT PUBLIC HEARING ON
THE INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING REPORT

January 29, 2013

Catherine H. Smith, Commissioner
Department of Economic and Community Development

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Butler, Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished committee members. My name is Catherine Smith and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development. I am here to express my support for the report of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing.

DECD is the State's lead agency responsible for strengthening Connecticut's competitive position in the new high-tech, knowledge-based global economy. The agency takes a comprehensive approach to economic development that incorporates housing and community development, as well as culture and tourism into our economic development strategies.

Within DECD, the Office of Housing and Community Development works in concert with municipal leaders, public agencies, community groups, local housing authorities, and other non-profit housing developers in the planning and development of affordable homeownership and rental housing units, the preservation of existing multi-family housing developments, and community revitalization through a wide range of activities. This Office is also responsible for long-term compliance monitoring to assure adherence to statutes, regulations and financial assistance agreements for housing development and preservation activities funded by DECD.

In our view, creating and preserving affordable and workforce housing and promoting economic development are inextricably linked. Expanding affordable housing opportunities for Connecticut residents is not an end in itself but a necessary means to empower individuals and families, strengthen communities and build a more robust and competitive economy. It is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do for Connecticut's future.

I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the other members of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing and Anne Foley, its Chair. As more fully set forth in its report, the Interagency Council found that the affordable housing needs in Connecticut are widespread and diverse. We need more affordable housing in our suburbs, cities and rural communities. We need affordable housing for the most vulnerable and poorest residents, the working poor, low- and moderate-income elderly individuals and couples, and households with incomes around the local area median, including young professionals. We need affordable housing close to jobs, public transit, good schools and critical services. We also need housing that is designed to enhance the surrounding neighborhood and operate sustainably for decades to come.

The Interagency Council also recognized the tremendous value of consolidating in one agency the many housing programs currently administered by several agencies. Through consolidation, the State can more efficiently and effectively deploy the historic financial resources committed by the Governor and this legislature in accordance with a clear and comprehensive vision.

The specific programs that are recommended for transfer to the new Department of Housing in the Interagency Council's report, including those currently administered by DECD, were carefully selected to make such efficiency and comprehensive vision possible.

The consolidation of the housing programs as set forth in the Interagency Council's report will also facilitate better coordination of the State's affordable housing policy with its agenda in the many areas that are related to housing, including, for example, economic development, transportation, education, social services, energy conservation, and public health. At a time when the State must "do more with less," it is imperative that the State align its investments in affordable housing with its expenditures in these other areas.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the efforts and insights of my fellow members on the Interagency Council and for all of the organizations and individuals who provided valuable input during the course of the Interagency Council's deliberations.