

Housing Committee Public Hearing
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Remarks from David R. Kennedy
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Rep. Butler, Sen. Bartolomeo, Rep. Miller, Sen. McKinney, Distinguished members of the Housing Committee,

I am David Kennedy, Chief Operating Officer for United Way of Coastal Fairfield County which covers 12 communities from Darien to Stratford along the shore and the communities just to the north, from New Canaan east to Trumbull. I am also Member of the state's Achievement Gap Task Force created under PA 11-85.

My remarks are coming from the perspective of closing the achievement gap in Connecticut and the role that affordable housing plays in that. And I'm sharing with you some research data that the Achievement Gap Task Force has learned along with some links for more information.

Like you I have learned a great deal about school performance and our goal of giving children not just the best education possible but also the greatest opportunity to succeed and achieve fulfillment. It is what many refer to as the Opportunity Gap in our state.

And along the way, I've learned that where children and their families live can be a huge factor in achieving the goal of equal opportunity and equal achievement for life long success.

If our Number 1 job as a state, as a legislature, is to adequately educate our children to prepare them as workers, parents and productive citizens, then our job is to ensure they are in the most appropriate learning environment.

For some, that means additional resources to help the urban schools, communities and families where they now live -- in cities where they can be close to their culture, friends and family members.

But for other families, who determine that their children's needs cannot be met where they now live, they need the **SAME CHOICE WE ALL ENJOY** -- that is, to find a school, a neighborhood and community services that will allow their children to flourish. We all want the same for our children. But many working class families in CT are given few choices because the **GREAT MAJORITY OF COMMUNITIES** make zoning decisions which, have the consequence of excluding them.

Now, the research. It's clear from study after study: Children who not only go to a high-resource, high-performing school from 9 am to 3 pm but also **LIVE IN** a high-resource community from 3pm to 9 am have higher reading and math scores. Plain and simple. Two examples.

A study just completed by Princeton University Prof. Douglas Massey shows that the children and families who were allowed to move into Mt. Laurel, NJ as a result of the landmark Mt. Laurel anti-housing discrimination case - have flourished at school, at work and beyond! Two simple quotes from Prof. Massey: "These residents were more involved in the education of their children." And, "We conclude affordable housing can provide needy families with a firm pathway ... to better educational outcomes for their children."

<http://www.huduser.org/portal/pdredge/pdr edge featd article 012513.html>

A second research example: Last year, there was a symposium on this issue here in Hartford, sponsored by *The Partnership for Strong Communities*. Heather Schwartz of the Rand Corp shared the results of her comprehensive longitudinal study in Maryland. It showed, similarly that working-class children who could live in affluent Montgomery County, MD and, as a result, go to its high-resource schools saw their reading and math scores dramatically increase. One data point: by the end of elementary school, the gap had been cut by 50%.

<http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Schwartz.pdf>

(For anyone interested in more information about these studies, I have enclosed in my written testimony links that will give you that information.)

If you weaken 8-30g and allow communities with good schools and abundant resources to use their zoning power in a way that excludes these children – intentional or not - you run the risk of consigning them and their families to a permanent underclass and make it hugely difficult, if not impossible, to ever close our achievement gap!

8-30g is one tool that the state needs to encourage – if not push – communities to share their high performing schools and resources with students who would not otherwise have access to them. It is one tool that will help to close the achievement gap in Connecticut, one student at a time. Please, don't weaken that tool.

Finally, let me take a moment to thank you as representatives of the General Assembly for all the other tools that you – with the leadership of the Executive Branch – have developed and designed these past few years to help close the achievement and opportunity gaps in CT. Those tools are making a difference. Thank you.