

Affordable and Supportive Housing



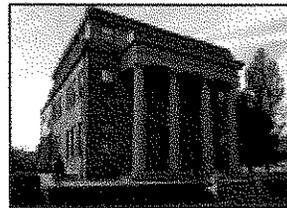
Community Partnerships



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Bill 5058

Mollye Wolahan

Any discussion that includes reducing the tools available to us as advocates of creating safe and affordable housing will stop us in our tracks and bring us to you today. I thank you Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Butler and the entire Housing Committee for the opportunity to speak this morning. My name is Mollye Wolahan and I am the Deputy Director of the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, a mission driven, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing affordable housing and economic opportunity throughout Southern New England. My comments will touch broadly on all of the housing bills before you today.

The numbers regarding the need for affordable housing are staggering and have only increased in our country throughout my lifetime as the income disparity between those who earn a livable wage and those who do not, has increased.

As we bring the concept of affordable housing to new communities in which we work, we focus on the concept of affordability and what it means to all of us to have the opportunity and luxury to spend 30% or less of our income to meet our housing needs. This discussion brings the face of affordability to our working class and those who serve us – our nurses, our teachers, our firefighters and our police officers – there are dwindling opportunities for these people to live affordability in the communities in which they serve.

A recent study by the Corporation for Enterprise Development has found that 44% of Americans don't have enough savings to stay out of poverty for more than three months should they lose their current income. This number is greater for Connecticut where our affordability of homes and rent is higher than the national averages. Renters in Connecticut must earn at least \$23 an hour to afford the typical two-bedroom apartment. Our minimum wage is currently \$8.25.

I am focusing on the numbers with you today – supply and demand drives the work that we do. So much of the discussion here today on the bills before you for review presuppose that 10% number guiding the use of 8-30g is the number that is meeting the affordability needs in our communities; and that number can be reduced as a carrot to meet other community needs of diversity in income or population. I would argue that number is too small, that even in communities that have met the 10% threshold, the needs for affordability are still great and dire for a range of populations from the homeless to the elderly to our working class. Affordable housing is local and is not a problem to only be addressed in urban or suburban areas – the efforts to create affordability in rural communities are complicated and the reducing 8-30g for these areas would limit our efforts to promote affordability in these communities that desperately need it.

We have decades of data showing that affordability in housing will not be maintained without restrictions requiring it to target those at certain income levels and restrictions on the operations of the property to maintain this affordability. Any programs or changes in the housing regulations that allow senior housing to be included in the 10% requirement must also come with these affordability restrictions.

The State of Connecticut has been a leader in supporting the funding and opportunities to create affordable housing and we are grateful to the Administration for the recent funding that has been dedicated to our work. However, the problem of affordability in housing is getting larger, and the work we due to meet this need is getting more complicated and we have very few tools in our toolbox to draw from to work on these issues; I ask you to think carefully before limiting the remaining tools that we do have as you assess changes to 8-30g.