

**Testimony of the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health**

*In Support of Raised Bill No. 6574: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Consider Impediments to Fair Housing Choice*

To the Distinguished Co-Chairs and Members of the Planning and Development Committee  
March 18, 2013

Good afternoon, Distinguished Co-Chairs and Members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Paul Hutcheon and I am on the Executive Board of the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (CADH), Chair of CADH's Advocacy Committee and the Director of the Central Connecticut Health District, representing the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield.

CADH supports *Raised Bill 6574: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Consider Impediments to Fair Housing Choice* to, among other reasons, improve health outcomes for Connecticut's residents. It has been long-known that housing is a significant determinant of health. Lead exposure can lead to significant abnormalities in cognitive development; asbestos and radon exposure can increase the chance of developing lung cancer; uncontrolled moisture, mold, pests, and other triggers cause or exacerbate asthma and other respiratory dysfunction; inadequate heat can lead to use of inappropriate heating sources, such as portable heaters, candles, and gas stoves, potentially resulting in fires or carbon monoxide poisoning; and poorly maintained stairwells and other structures can cause injuries. Accordingly, ensuring that all Connecticut residents have access to a healthy home is critical to promoting healthier outcomes.

But creating a healthy home only goes so far to promise health. That home also must be affordable. High housing costs leave families with insufficient income left for food, health care, prescriptions and other health essentials. Families unable to afford housing may also move frequently—resulting from eviction, foreclosure and temporary arrangements—and may live in overcrowded conditions, resulting in higher risk for communicable disease. The physical and emotional toll of these factors can cause significant adverse health outcomes. At its worst, inability to afford housing leads to homelessness, which exacerbates any health problem and makes medical treatment and follow-up nearly impossible.

But even well-maintained, affordable housing does not go far enough to meaningfully promote health. That housing must be located in areas of opportunity that support healthy choices and promote healthy living. Community conditions can impact physical activity levels, community safety, food access, air quality, social cohesion, and even economic and educational opportunities. In other words, your neighborhood has a critical impact on opportunities to achieve good health. Finally, racial residential segregation and concentrated poverty themselves are tied in direct and indirect ways to adverse health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> For example, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, David R. and Chiquita Collins. *Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundamental Cause of Disparities in Health*. < <http://www.publichealthreports.org/issueopen.cfm?articleID=1121>>. Accessed March 14, 2013.

Health Equity Index, a CADH-developed, community-based electronic tool that profiles and measures community conditions that affect health, of the 15 Connecticut communities with the lowest health outcome scores, 14 of them are municipalities where at least 10 percent of housing stock is considered affordable. In other words, affordable housing is least available in the state's most health-promoting areas.

In sum, every Connecticut resident should be able to live in a healthy, affordable home in a neighborhood of opportunity. Understanding the impediments to fair housing choice is critical to reaching this goal, which if achieved, will improve health outcomes statewide in the process. Accordingly, CADH supports *Raised Bill No. 6574: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Consider Impediments to Fair Housing Choice*.

CADH is a nonprofit organization comprised of Connecticut's 74 local health departments and districts. Local health directors are the statutory agents of the Commissioner of Public Health and are critical providers of essential public health services at the local level in Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration.