



*Testimony of Open Communities Alliance
before the Housing Committee
February 5, 2015*

RE: Opposing all bills that would weaken CGS Sec. 8-30g

Good evening Senator Holder-Winfield, Representative Butler and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Erin Boggs and I am the Executive Director of Open Communities Alliance (OCA). Today I would like to address why it is imperative that the Affordable Housing Appeals Act in no way be weakened.

In 1926 the US Supreme Court decided a case that established municipal zoning as we know it - known as *Euclidian* zoning. The case, *Euclid v. Ambler*, held that municipalities could be entrusted with the responsibility to make zoning decisions about residential versus commercial use, lot sizes, and units per acre.¹ What few people realize is that the very case that establishes our current system of zoning has exclusionary roots. In the District Court case that led to the Supreme Court decision the judge wrote that,

*[t]he blighting of property values and the congesting of the population, whenever the colored or certain foreign races invade a residential section, are so well known as to be within the judicial cognizance.*²

We as a state and a country are struggling with the historical legacy of the kind of racist sentiment evident in *Euclid*.

Exclusionary zoning, along with racial covenants, redlining and many other policies supported by municipal and state governments created the race/place dynamics that we have today. These are thriving White suburbs that are increasingly growing older while lower income working families, disproportionately of color, are isolated in high poverty struggling urban areas.

I will be blunt – people of color in Connecticut earn half or less of what White people earn.³ Unless we create affordable housing opportunities in thriving communities children that are part of the only demographic that is growing in Connecticut that is not elderly will be cut off from all the building blocks

¹ *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926).

² *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 297 F. 307, 312-13 (N.D. Ohio 1924)

³ ACS 2006 to 2010 Table B19101H; ACS 2006 to 2010 Table B19101B

needed for success.⁴ Just these children are our economic future, including the future of the very municipalities that are opposing CGS Sec. 8-30g. Efforts to revitalize struggling urban areas will only work on a large scale if some people who live there actually have a choice of other places to live. This creates voluntary poverty de-concentration.

Because of the demographic dynamics – with growing White elderly populations who experience lower levels of poverty than the state as a whole and families of color who are experiencing much higher rates⁵ – that the Act appropriately does not include greater benefits, points or incentives for the creation of Senior housing. It must be noted that “Family” housing is really a misnomer. It should really be called “Open” housing because it is open to all - families, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

If every town in Connecticut builds its fair share of affordable housing, new pockets of poverty concentration will not develop. The Affordable Housing Appeals Act is designed to inspire just this kind of development because it is set up as a percentage of the overall housing stock and no longer applies when towns meet the 10% threshold.

The Affordable Housing Appeal Act went into effect in 1991. The towns that are now expressing concern about being subject to the Act have had 24 years to create the needed affordable housing. Study after study has shown that mixed income housing with a percentage of affordable units does not produce the parade of horrors so often predicted.⁶ I strongly urge the Housing Committee to hold strong on 8-30g. It is a matter of civil rights and housing choice and imperative for the future economic health of Connecticut.

⁴ Connecticut’s Changing Demographics: Crisis or Opportunity? Presentation by Orlando Rodriguez, January 29, 2013 to the Council on Philanthropy, http://3xa3sn2xtr6117bb6o2m6zwf8ea.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2013/01/CTCouncilPhilanthropy_29jan2013.pdf.

⁵ ACS 2013 1yr table S0201; <http://www.diversitydata.org>.

⁶ For a comprehensive discussion, see Douglas Massey et al., *Climbing Mount Laurel:*

The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb, Princeton University Press, 2013.