



State of Connecticut  
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Senator Winfield, Representative Butler and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Roland Lemar. I represent the towns of East Haven and New Haven as the State Representative for the 96<sup>th</sup> District. My district previously included Hamden which, like East Haven, is not 8-30g compliant. In fact, both towns have been sued under the statute. I have previously served as a city planner and later as planning and zoning commissioner.

During today's hearing you will hear a lot of arguments seeking to weaken 8-30g. I have heard some of those same arguments from my own constituents (though a far greater number of my constituents, in all three towns, favor housing access and economic and racial integration). I want to preview and respond to some of those arguments today.

(1) It is not true that Section 8-30g undermines neighborhood character and local planning.

As a former planner and planning commissioner, I know that a planner's job extends beyond keeping things the same all the time. Housing markets change. Demographics change. And towns have to respond to those changes. Sure, not every town is appropriate for a 100 unit apartment building. But 8-30g does not require that.

There are stellar examples of single-family and townhome developments, in Connecticut and beyond, that incorporate affordable housing. These developments fit into low-density environments. A good planner, a good planning commission, will proactively design high-quality affordable housing that fits into existing neighborhoods so that her town becomes 8-30g compliant. High-quality affordable housing need not undermine local character. In fact, this bill may undermine local character because it creates an incentive for developers to propose large housing developments so that at least four units can be set aside as affordable housing. In some neighborhoods the right answer is six townhomes, two of which are affordable. That kind of development does not on its face undermine neighborhood character.

Towns that stick their heads in the sand and refuse to proactively build housing that is consistent with local planning will be subject to lawsuits by developers who are less attentive to design. Even then, 8-30g doesn't mandate that the development be built. It simply places the onus on the town to prove to a court that the development is not in the public interest.

There is a context and a history for "neighborhood character" and "local control." A single-family neighborhood, built on the crabgrass frontier in the 1950s and 1960s, was built in order to exclude those who could not afford a house on a quarter or half an acre. It was built to exclude those who could not qualify for a redlined mortgage. And it was built to exclude those expressly described in racial restrictive covenants. That is the neighborhood character that advocates of "local control" seek to preserve. But we should all be looking to improve upon neighborhood character, to build inclusive places that advance opportunity and integration. That is the charge of a good local planner and an effective planning commission.

(2) It is not true that Section 8-30g does not count elderly housing or housing built before 1990.

There is a great deal of misinformation about section 8-30g. Suburban local news outlets often report that housing constructed before 1990 and elderly-only housing "do not count" for the purposes of 8-30g. This simply isn't true. If it were true, I doubt any town in the state would be compliant.

In 2000, we added a moratorium process to the statute. The moratorium process grants a four year exemption from the statute to towns that have shown progress in constructing affordable housing units since the statute was passed in 1990. The moratorium application gives two points for hard-to-build rental units and fewer points for units that are easier to build. Because elderly-only developments do not include schoolchildren, they are politically easier to build. As a result they receive fewer points under the moratorium process. It is worth noting that elderly units receive full points when calculating whether a town is compliant with 8-30g even though these units do not serve the statute's goal of expanding opportunity to resources such as public education and growing jobs in the suburbs.

From Darien to Berlin, a good number of Connecticut towns have sought and achieved moratoria from 8-30g. Recent moratorium recipients include Wilton and Ridgefield. Farmington has indicated that it intends to apply this month. The moratorium process works for those towns that make an earnest effort to be inclusive.

I firmly believe that 8-30g works and that we should not undermine it. House Bill 5363 includes some reasonable changes to the statute but also some unnecessary weakening of the statute. And 8-30g opponents have already been quoted in the press as arguing that even more extensive changes must be made to 8-30g and promising to seek those changes this session. They are wrong. Our towns are as segregated as ever. Low-income children's opportunity to access quality education and, later in life, jobs is as low as it has been in any of our lifetimes. Now is not the time to undermine one of the only tools we have in the fight to advance housing opportunity and integration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.