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Committee on Planning and Development
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Testimony in Vigorous Support of
SB 329 AAC The Political Composition of Certain Municipal Bodies

I am Martin Mador. I speak for myself on this bill, which I asked the chairs to raise. I am the Sierra Club Legislative and Political Chair. I served on the Hamden Natural Resources and Open Space (Conservation) Commission for seven years, and have served on the Hamden Energy Use and Climate Change Commission for eight years. I have been the special projects consultant to the CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, where I published a book about Conservation Commissions.

My grateful thanks to the Committee for raising this bill. Perhaps simplistic on its face, it holds the potential to increase citizen participation in advisory town boards and commissions. There is no downside.

Dating back perhaps long ago as 1959, we have had political quotas for municipal boards, commissions, legislative bodies, committees. Statute (9-167a) refers to this as “minority representation”. This applies to all town bodies with regulatory or legislative authority, as well as those with only advisory powers. For example, Conservation Commissions, authorized by state statute (7-131a) are strictly advisory, but appointments are nonetheless governed by 9-167a.

Following state law, when we populate our town commissions, we look for diversity of members, but only consider party affiliation. Perhaps, maybe, possibly, there is some merit to this for commissions with regulatory authority. However, we should let nothing impede our efforts to fill advisory commissions, such Conservation and Energy, with interested and knowledgeable town residents.

Imagine ensuring helpful diversity on these commissions. We might take into account:

- age
- gender
- race/ethnicity
- education
- residence location in town
- residence type
- length of residence in town
- children
- or perhaps even
- emotional maturity
- ability to effectively communicate
- strength of connection with reality

Or perhaps we should just try to find people interested and vested in the commission's mission and work, and make sure we can find someone to fill every position. Political affiliation just doesn't seem that relevant when considering how to maximize town open space, or ensure the town has maximal access to clean energy and understands the returns on promoting energy efficiency.

Towns which are heavily democratic or republican could have trouble finding enough people with these party quotas in place. Hamden has had that problem with our Energy Use and Climate Change Commission.

Do I know how many other towns share this challenge? Conducting a comprehensive study of the impact on 169 towns would take significant effort. I'm sure OPM would file a bill-killing fiscal note if so ordered. Would the National Conference of State Legislatures agree do a national study for us? But why be concerned with the exact scope of the impact?

This change is helpful and benign on its face. It costs nothing to implement. It has no impact on the state budget deficit. It favors no one with some advocacy position.

Senate Bill 329 solves this problem by simply removing the political affiliation quotas requirement, but **only** for advisory boards and commissions. It is silent on rules for appointing legislative bodies and regulatory boards such as Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands.

If we impose rules on how we govern, we need to make sure they are appropriate, helpful, justified. Yes, we are the Land of Steady Habits, but just because we have done something the same way for the past half century, there is no reason not to stop to consider whether that has serves us well, and should perhaps be amended.