



State of Connecticut
DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

TESTIMONY OF THE DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

IN OPPOSITION TO:

S.B. No. 259 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING INSPECTIONS BY FIRE MARSHALS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
March 1, 2016

The Division of Criminal Justice opposes S.B. No. 259, An Act Concerning Inspections by Fire Marshals, as now drafted and would respectfully recommend the Committee's JOINT FAVORABLE SUBSTITUTE Report to delete the current language and substitute language to establish a state property maintenance code for Connecticut.

For the record, I am Judith R. Dicine, the Supervisory Assistant State's Attorney for Housing Matters, and I appear before the Committee today in that official capacity. Pursuant to Section 51-278 of the General Statutes the Division of Criminal Justice is responsible for the prosecution of criminal housing matters within the State of Connecticut. It is on the basis of our experience and resulting expertise in the investigation and prosecution of criminal housing matters that the Division must strongly oppose S.B. No. 259 in its present form.

S.B. No. 259 proposes to improve the protection of public safety by allowing cross-deputizing of routine fire safety inspections to certain non-experts. This is inherently a bad concept because of the necessary specialized work required for most fire inspections. Local and state fire marshals, deputy marshals and fire inspectors all receive lengthy training and testing in fire safety law administration and enforcement from the Department of Administrative Services, Office of Data and Education Management. The code module of that class alone runs three days a week for six months. It includes training on the requirements for the many mandatory occupancy inspections, plus gas systems, sprinklers, egress issues, legal enforcement and much more. Although deputizing a non-expert seems helpful to increase public safety and reduce municipal liability, we respectfully but strongly believe it is not. Lack of sufficient inspection staff, however, is a real problem for our cities and towns. We suggest it can be better helped in the following way:

The State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) has the superior solution. SHIP is made up of a coalition of nearly three hundred agencies and organizations joined in a statewide initiative to prevent injury and illness through changes in policy and procedures that will improve the public health and produce needed health equity in our state. (For more information

see www.ct.gov/dph/SHIPCoalition and www.ct.gov/dph/Dashboard). It includes an SHIP approved strategy for a healthier Connecticut by 2020 through a "cooperative compliance" model. This will improve conditions in housing by requiring compliance with our codes while at the same time assisting property owners to make necessary repairs, thereby preventing costly and sometimes debilitating injuries and illnesses stemming from substandard housing. To ensure we have equity and the same minimal requirements for decent safe and sanitary conditions for all of Connecticut, SHIP proposes the adoption of a statewide property maintenance code. We have no statewide minimum health and safety standards, and existing statutes cannot serve the purpose for maintenance of existing housing. Therefore, in support of and on behalf of the SHIP Advisory Council, we respectfully suggest the Committee adopt JOINT SUBSTITUTE language for S.B. No. 259 establishing a statewide property maintenance code.

In conclusion, the Division wishes to thank the Committee for affording this opportunity to provide input on this matter. We would be happy to answer any questions or provide any additional information the Committee might require.