



Testimony of Monica Belyea in support of H.B. 7297, An Act Establishing a Private Right Of Action in the Duty to Promote Fair Housing and Requiring a Study of Connecticut's Housing Inventory and Current and Future Housing Needs.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Representative Lemar, Senator Cassano, Senator Logan and Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am a resident of Middletown and I have been a Public Health practitioner in Connecticut since 1995. I currently serve as the Program Planner for Opportunity Knocks, Middletown's Early Health and Learning Initiative, supported by Middlesex Hospital. I am testifying in support of H.B. 7297, An Act Establishing a Private Right Of Action in the Duty to Promote Fair Housing and Requiring a Study of Connecticut's Housing Inventory and Current and Future Housing Needs. This is an important first step in achieving housing equity for our State.

We have known for some years that the neighborhood where you live impacts your health, mental health, educational attainment and economic prospects. In addition to fewer economic opportunities, living in a poor community contributes to toxic stress, asthma, diabetes and other chronic diseases. Here in Connecticut people of color are disproportionately concentrated in poor communities.

As you know, Connecticut is one of the most racially- and economically-segregated states in the country. We have incredible and unacceptable health disparities and educational achievement gaps. Our state did not get this way by accident. We are seeing the effects of decades of policies like exclusionary zoning and redlining. These policies, and others like them, continue to shape the health, education and economic attainment of our residents. While we may not have written those policies it is up to us to take corrective action, to do the right thing. Fortunately, the evidence shows that in this case doing the right thing will benefit all of us.

When housing policy is done well it has the potential to reduce our school achievement gap in ways education cost sharing and curriculum mandates cannot. Housing policy, when done well, has the potential to positively impact health outcomes like asthma, diabetes and heart disease in ways that health care has not. Fair housing policy has the potential to save our state money and help us turn the curve toward progress on these historic inequities.

I live in downtown Middletown. My immediate 4 block radius has transitional and supportive housing, families with Section 8 certificates, Housing Authority complexes, federally subsidized Elderly and Disabled housing complexes, college students and middle and upper income homeowners. I love this diversity; I chose to buy my home in the middle of this diversity; I don't want to see anyone pushed out. What I don't love is that Middletown has taken on more than its fair share and we are struggling as a community to provide all of the supports that our families need and deserve. What I would like, and this bill is offering, is a chance for us to do our best for everyone. As a community we are working really hard across agencies and economic sectors to support families who are struggling, trying to help everyone

make gains. We will continue to do this work but we'll never get ahead if government policies don't actively work to ensure that every town takes on its fair share of affordable housing.

We need to invest in revitalizing struggling communities, but we also need to consciously work to generate the housing choices in thriving communities that have been denied to many low income families of color for decades.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I am in favor of taking bold steps to end housing segregation in Connecticut. Please support HB 7297.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Monica Belyea".

Monica Belyea, MPH, RD, on behalf of Opportunity Knocks for Middletown's Young Children Community Collaborative