

Testimony of Lisa Dabrowski 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 22nd, 2017

Thank you Chairs and Members of the Planning and Development Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lisa Dabrowski, and I am a lifetime resident of Marlborough. 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. I regret that I am unable to testify in person.

Growing up in Marlborough, I only saw or knew white children from privileged families. I believed this was the reality of Connecticut. By a stroke of luck, I was able to attend the agricultural-technology program at Glastonbury High School, which allows students from the Hartford region to attend Glastonbury High School rather than their local school. Because of this program, my eyes were opened to the realities faced by people who did not grow up like I did. I had classes with students from Hartford, Newington, East Hartford, New Britain, and Manchester, as well as others students from Glastonbury, Marlborough, and Wethersfield. I credit this program for not only giving me a valuable education, but also for broadening my exposure to the world and my peers. This program was my first step to realizing how much my skin color allowed me to attain so much more than people of color who were much like myself.

When attending college and law school, my eyes were opened further to the fact that Connecticut is one of the most racially- and economically-segregated states in the country, with people of color being disproportionately lower-income and concentrated in areas of the state that are struggling. Our own University of Connecticut and School of Law provided me with an abundance of literature and research on the dangers of segregation, poverty, and civil rights violations. Because where you live strongly influences your chances of success, health outcomes, school achievement, and long-term well-being, I found my passion to be advocating for fair housing policy so that the same privileges that I received because I am white are available to all residents of Connecticut.

I believe that resolving segregation in Connecticut is even more imperative given our current economic environment. By systematically disadvantaging a significant portion of our residents, we are depriving the state of people who can contribute to the workforce and the community, and most ironically depriving the state of significant tax revenue. Research has shown that by providing affordable housing in thriving communities, an 8-year-old child from a low-income family moving from a struggling neighborhood can earn \$302,000 more in their lifetime. By connecting lower-income families to the networks and resources that typically White wealthy families already have access to, we can help to raise these families out of poverty, reduce the stress experienced by both parents and children, and create stronger communities for the betterment of all of Connecticut.

Now that I have attended undergraduate and law school and become a civil rights attorney, I find myself living in Marlborough with my husband in my parents' home. Despite myself being an attorney and my husband being a federal employee, and strongly middle class,

we are unable to afford a home of our own in even a rural town such as Marlborough. If I, with a stable two-income household, cannot find a place to live that I can afford in my own hometown, how can we expect families with less privilege to find a safe, affordable home where they can also thrive?

H.B. 7297 could be more comprehensive if it also included an expansion of housing authority jurisdiction, clear and balanced geographic goals for the location of government housing investments, support for strategies to better connect low income children of color to high performing schools, and adjustments to existing homeownership programs enabling them to bring income diversity to struggling communities. Connecticut needs to take a stronger stance on fair housing, for its residents and for the state as a whole. The first step to do this is H.B. 7297.