

Middlesex Coalition for Children

Testimony of Izzi Greenberg 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 Izzi Greenberg. I live in Middletown and am the director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children, an economic and racial justice organization that works to improve outcomes for children and families in Middletown and Middlesex County.

I am testifying today 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. Housing integration is an issue that is both personal and professional for me, and one that I believe is the key to solving some of our state's hardest challenges. My neighborhood in Middletown is both racially and economically segregated; the children and families that live there experience disparate outcomes in education and health, and have some of the lowest incomes in the city. Segregation like this is bad for my community, and it is bad for our state.

My work over the last 15 years, first as a community organizer in this very neighborhood, and now as an advocate, has been focused on revitalizing a struggling community to create the type of opportunity easily accessed by higher income neighborhoods. After all of this time, though, we aren't moving the needle. Revitalizing segregated neighborhoods is the right thing to do in that it brings the quality of life to a higher standard for the people who live there, but by allowing the type of extreme segregation we have in Connecticut to continue, we are limiting the long-term gains in life outcomes that my neighbors deserve.

We have a long history of policy that has created a system in which housing for low-income families is only available and affordable in a few pockets in our state. We need to expand the selection of affordable housing to areas of the state that can offer low-income residents a real chance of long-term success for their families. Research has shown that where you live strongly influences your chances of success, including health, school achievement, and long-term success and well-being.

I am actively working to revitalize my community because it's important, but my city is up against an impossible challenge if government policies don't actively work to ensure that every town takes on its fair share of affordable housing. Middletown is home to nearly all the People of Color in Middlesex County and an unacceptable number of these families live in areas of concentrated poverty. Children need access to fully-resourced schools and other opportunities to live full, complete, healthy lives. We cannot wait any longer.

Improving the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County.

Middlesex Coalition for Children

We have the opportunity to make Connecticut a leader in fair housing policy and to rewrite the story for the many low-income families in our state that are stuck in neighborhoods that can't and won't offer them a chance at success.

My organization works in a few main areas, including early childhood, family economic security, and education, three areas that have shown to have significant educational and life outcomes when children and families live in mixed income environments.

Connecticut has one of greatest educational achievement gaps in the country. My community is no exception, and we have been trying to find a way to level the playing field for years. Additionally, we are constantly under threat of falling out of balance with the state's racial balance laws.

We know that to fix our schools we must integrate our neighborhoods, but even within one town, there is little will or know-how to create the kind of partnership between planning, education, health, and social services to make the changes that will create lasting change. We've tried redistricting; we've threatened to close the schools with the highest concentration of minority students. None of this is working because our housing hasn't changed. And it won't unless there is real incentive to do so. It's just too easy to let struggling communities languish. The hard work is in tackling the system head on.

I hope you agree that this is the time to move our state forward and stop leaving so many of our residents behind.