

Testimony in support of House Bill 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

Rachel Leventhal-Weiner, PhD

Thank you to the co-Chairs, Representative Lemar, Senator Cassano and Senator Logan, and members of the Planning and Development Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 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. My name is Dr. Rachel Leventhal-Weiner and I am sociologist of education. I have been teaching about educational inequality and advocating for educational equity for the past five years. I regret that I am unable to testify in person.

Connecticut is a deeply segregated state and the racial and economic segregation has serious consequences for the life opportunities of those citizens confined to our segregated communities. Our segregated zip codes are [not accidental](#). We behave as though families live in communities by choice, but going back decades white families have built wealth and equity because mortgage lenders availed them the capital to build a suburban life here in Connecticut. During that same period of time, institutionally sanctioned racist practices of redlining and mortgage lending prevented families of color from building wealth through property ownership. Families who have been shut out of economic opportunities must work twice as hard to ensure any kind of economic security for their families.

Even when segregation was no longer permissible by law, the damage of racism in mortgage lending had already codified segregation in communities. The consequences of redlining and institutional racism in lending practices are far-reaching. We overlaid school district boundaries on the physical landscape, confining segregated communities to segregated schools. This means that children of color and children in families living at or below the federal poverty line are attending schools that are consistently [under-resourced](#). Many education advocates and legislators have demanded that we reform our school finance system and while this is a necessary step in reducing racial and economic isolation in our schools, simply equalizing school funding will not undo the decades of disinvestment in struggling communities. Students attending under-resourced schools have endured disruptions at every turn in their education, including changing school and district leadership, cutbacks to curricular offerings that make school a desirable place to go, and insufficient support staffing including school social workers and school psychologists. More equitable funding would certainly help schools in struggling districts to provide a high quality education, but many families would choose a school for their child by choosing another community to live in--just as families with the means to do so have done for decades. Families without the means to move must remain in their existing community because they lack access to much needed affordable housing.

Mountains of social science literature would indicate that parents' level of education and socioeconomic status are among the strongest indicators of their children's future life outcomes, including higher earnings, delayed parenthood, and staying out of the criminal justice system. Newer research indicates that the [timing of a family's move](#) from a struggling to a thriving community also has long term consequences--the earlier children and families have access to thriving communities, the better their long-term life outcomes. Thriving communities are able to enhance social life by providing desirable public spaces, activities that bind the community together, and mentors and supports that connect students to opportunities outside of their schools.

I am a proud resident of West Hartford and a current public school parent. I want all families to have the opportunity to live in a diverse community that accepts them and that is open to the contributions they can make to social life. Implicit biases are difficult to change and without a concerted effort to provide affordable housing for all residents throughout Connecticut, as outlined in H.B. 7297, I fear we will never see an equitable future for all of our families.

It is time to face our history and make bold choices regarding segregated housing and House Bill 7297 affords the prospect of more balanced housing policy to provide families across the state--especially those who have been systematically excluded--with the opportunity to choose a new community. By expanding access to affordable housing, maintaining data on housing production, and increasing transparency on housing investments, we begin to face our history of segregation and make affirmative moves to ensure a greater quality of life for all of our citizens.

I remain available for further questions via email at rachel.leventhal@gmail.com or by phone at (860) 571-6215.

Thank you for considering my testimony.
Rachel Leventhal-Weiner, PhD