

Testimony of Kim McLaughlin in Support of H.B. 7297
Before the Planning & Development Committee of the Connecticut Legislature
Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Good Afternoon: Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Planning & Development Committee. My name is Kim McLaughlin. I live in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and I am writing you today to express my full support for H.B. 7297.

I have worked as a community organizer in many different Connecticut communities for the last 30 years. Most recently, I worked for 10 years as the Director of Organizing at the Publicly-Assisted Housing Resident Network (PHRN), a statewide, independent, resident-led organization that was affiliated with the Connecticut Housing Coalition. During that time, I have heard the concerns of hundreds of families when considering where to live.

Many of us have had choices about where to live. I live in Bridgeport because my husband and I made a decision 28 years ago that Bridgeport would be a good place to raise our daughter. Like most middle-income families, we considered the schools (were they good?), the neighborhood (was it safe? my husband plays soccer: are there nearby recreational opportunities? were there other families with children living on our street?), and of course, the cost of housing. We made a choice to live in Bridgeport because we could afford to live there. We have never regretted it. My daughter attended city schools, my husband joined a soccer team, and I got involved in neighborhood, school, and city life. It was our choice.

We had a choice 28 years ago. But during those 28 years, due to the kind of work I do, I have had hundreds of conversations with low and moderate income families who have not had the same opportunity. The color of their skin, their amount of income, the source of their income, their sexual orientation, their current zip code, or their family makeup, were some of the barriers that prevented their access to higher opportunity housing or the ability to exercise choice in making their decision. Don't get me wrong: some families wanted to remain in the housing or the neighborhood in which they currently lived. But other families – many other families (mostly low- and very-low-income families) – had the same desire to consider choices that my husband and I did. They did not have the opportunity. Connecticut's lack of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families, and barriers preventing access to housing in dozens of communities prevented the families that shared their stories with me from being able to access opportunity or exercise choice.

I believe that Connecticut must immediately begin to close the gap in housing opportunity that has been created over many years, and I know that the process begins with each of you. H.B. 7297 could be more comprehensive if it included the other sections of Open Communities Alliance's proposal: the 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. But, I believe that H.B. 7297 will begin addressing the changes very much needed in our state. I urge you to pass it out of committee and move it to the next step in the process of consideration by the Connecticut legislature.