

Testimony of the Rev. Josh Pawelek 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”
Wednesday, March 22nd, 2017

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek. I am a resident of Glastonbury and I have served as the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester for the past fourteen years. I wish to thank Chairs Lemar, Cassano and Logan and all the members of the Planning and Development Committee for the opportunity to testify 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”

I am not an expert on housing law, but I know what I see as I travel around CT’s cities and towns. I see racial and class segregation. I hear reports or read articles from time to time that confirm the truth of what I see. We know Connecticut is one of the most racially and economically segregated states in the country. We know both historic and modern policies and practices have and continue to hold segregation in place. We know people of color communities are concentrated in areas of the state that are struggling. The reports and articles are out there—there is a lot of great material on the Open Communities Alliance website at <http://www.ctoca.org/>—but nothing convinces me more that we live in a highly segregated state than those days when I travel from Glastonbury, where I live, to North Hartford for a meeting. The differences between the two communities are obvious and stark.

I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Despite the work of many dedicated politicians, government officials and activists over the decades, race and class segregation remain entrenched in our state. While this negatively impacts the quality of life for all of us, it is particularly pernicious for people and families who cannot break out of cycles of poverty—people who, primarily because of where they live, face enormous barriers to accessing quality education, quality healthcare, quality housing, quality jobs, and safe communities.

H.B. 7297 will not solve all of these problems, but I support it, and I appeal to you to support it, because it chips away at the barriers that prevent people who wish to relocate from impoverished areas to higher opportunity areas from doing so. It reduces barriers in two ways. It calls for the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to conduct an affordable housing needs assessment. This will allow for data-based planning to provide for the state’s affordable housing needs, including the needs of low income families, seniors, people with mobility challenges, and those in need of supportive housing. With this assessment as a solid base, we will be able to get a better sense of whether regions and towns are fully doing their part in addressing the significant dearth of affordable housing in the state.

Second, the bill restores a ‘private right of action’ to CGS Sec. 8-37cc, CT’s ‘Affirmatively Furthering’ law.’ The ‘private right of action’ enables private citizens and non-profits to raise concerns and even bring legal claims to enforce the provisions in the law that reduce racial and class segregation. Giving such power to private citizens was the original intent of the law, but the Supreme Court removed it in 2006. We need it back. Without the private right of action, the 8-37cc is essentially toothless.

Again, neither of these provisions in H.B. 7297 will end housing segregation in our state, but if we truly want to end housing segregation – and I trust that we do – then both provisions are essential, incremental steps. That’s why I support H.B. 7297 and that’s why I urge you to support it as well.