



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

MARCH 14, 2018

SB 342: AN ACT CONCERNING THE THRESHOLD FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION'S REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT SEPTIC SYSTEMS.

Sen. Kennedy, Sen. Miner, Rep. Demicco, honorable ranking members and members of the committee, my name is Sean Ghio and I am the policy director of the Partnership for Strong Communities. As many of you know, we are a statewide housing policy organization that educates and advocates for strategies to prevent and end homelessness, create affordable homes for all Connecticut residents and create effective community development strategies that combine smart housing policy with smart transportation, energy, environmental, and education policies.

I'm here to strongly support SB 342. We believe this bill can help make Connecticut economically stronger and provide for greater individual opportunity and greater fiscal health for our municipalities.

We are neither wastewater specialists nor environment quality experts, but we do understand housing policy - how smart housing policies can reduce sprawl, auto emissions and unwise energy use while sparking economic growth.

We know our state is suffering from high housing costs and slow population growth, much of which can be traced to too few housing options or, put another way, too little of the housing supply the market now demands — smaller, denser, more affordable homes near services, walkable to the town center and, if possible, close to transit stations.

As you know, dozens of municipalities in the state don't have sewer systems. And for many years that didn't slow growth much in the state. The single-family, suburban homes the market wanted were mostly built with individual septic systems.

But the housing market, and the state's fiscal and economic needs, have changed. The slow pace of building over the last decade has contributed to the 6th highest housing costs in the nation. Too many of our lower income earning households are burdened with their housing costs. Half of renters pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Baby Boomers want or need to downsize into rentals and condos if they are to remain in Connecticut. Their children, the Millennials, are burdened by our 1st-in-the-nation education debt so, for them to come home or move to Connecticut, they too need that denser more affordable option.

Developers have recognized the demand for multi-family homes and are building mixed-income homes in towns that may not have recognized the need before: Simsbury, Stonington, Brookfield, Ridgefield, Fairfield, Newtown, Guilford and more. There's that much demand.

But time is money. Avoiding delays and regulatory costs is a crucial factor in a developer's ability to build the homes Connecticut now needs. Passage of this bill will allow developers to work with the Department of Public Health for approval of larger ATS systems, reducing builders' costs and allowing them to safely build higher-density developments. This is key to reducing the purchase or rental costs of those new homes.

If you approve this bill, you will make the development process more straight forward without in any way infringing on the zoning authority and development decisions of municipalities. Town officials will still decide, with input from residents, whether to expand their array of housing options. But, if they do decide that they need more housing choices, passage of this bill would make it more feasible for builders to serve that need.

I am happy to tell you how this bill can improve the grand lists and fiscal strength of municipalities and lead to economic growth in Connecticut by creating the wider spectrum of housing choices needed to attract and retain the young, talented workforce Connecticut needs. Or I can answer any other questions you might have about the how smart housing policy can protect and improve environmental quality and health across the state.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Sean Ghio
Policy Director

