



## CITY OF HARTFORD

### DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

250 Constitution Plaza, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Hartford, Connecticut 06103

**LUKE A. BRONIN**  
Mayor

**LAURA SETTLEMYER**  
Director, Division of Blight  
Remediation

March 16, 2018

Chairmen Lemar, Cassano, and Logan, and members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **Raised Bill No. 5483, An Act Authorizing a Study of the Creation of a Land Bank Authority.**

My name is Laura Settlemyer, and I am the Director of Blight Remediation for Mayor Luke Bronin and the City of Hartford. In this capacity, I also serve as the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Hartford Land Bank. Prior to moving to Hartford and joining Mayor Bronin's administration, I worked in Michigan, providing technical assistance to land bank authorities in Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, and Marquette. I have worked with land bank authorities working in both urban and rural communities facing tremendous challenges related to vacant, abandoned, foreclosed, and problem properties.

Raised Bill No. 5483 proposes to authorize "a study regarding the creation of land bank authority to aid municipalities in the conversion of abandoned, tax-delinquent properties to productive use."

I support the creation of a land bank authority for cities like Hartford that are suffering from depressed property values and loss of property taxes as the result of vacant, abandoned, blighted, and tax-delinquent lots and structures. I would recommend that any study or report consider the implementation of statewide enabling legislation to permit municipalities to create local land bank authorities.

A land bank authority is an entity that works closely with a municipality and specializes in the conversion of vacant, abandoned, foreclosed, and problem properties into productive use. When adequately funded, a land bank can be an effective tool for (1) acquiring properties through blight- or tax-lien foreclosure that the open market has rejected and left as growing liabilities for neighborhoods and communities; (2) triaging specific challenges such as clearing back taxes, quieting title, demolishing unsafe structures, or remediating environmental issues; and (3) marketing and transferring properties back into productive use consistent with community priorities.

States and cities across the country have enacted statewide enabling legislation and created local land bank authorities. According to Center for Community Progress (the leading national resource for urban, suburban, and rural communities seeking to address the full cycle of property revitalization), as of January 2018, there are approximately 170 land banks operating in 23 states, including New York and Pennsylvania.

Under the leadership of Mayor Bronin, Hartford has set up a land bank as a not-for-profit entity in partnership with community stakeholders and neighborhood residents. The Connecticut legislature authorized a grant in 2016 to fund Hartford's land bank, and this year, with the help of the State Department of Housing, Hartford's land bank will begin to acquire abandoned, blighted properties and convert them into productive use. Hartford has done the research and is now getting to work.

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I would urge lawmakers and others wanting to conduct a study to look to the example being set in Hartford now as to how a land bank authority could be an effective tool for Hartford and other Connecticut municipalities and communities facing challenges related to abandoned and blighted residential, commercial, and industrial properties.

Substandard, deteriorating, and abandoned residential, commercial, and industrial structures negatively impact crime; endanger the general safety and welfare of the city's residents and neighborhoods, eroding the city's social fabric; and impose a high cost on the city and its taxpayers in diminishing property values and lost tax revenue.

We need more mechanisms and tools within state law now to enable municipalities and our community partners to take action and to do so without unnecessary delay.

I urge the Committee to support Raised Bill No. 5483, and I urge the Committee to consider any amendments that provide the mechanisms and tools we need now to further help and support municipalities' efforts to remediate blight in our neighborhoods and cities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Settlemyer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Laura Settlemyer  
Director of Blight Remediation  
City of Hartford