



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

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Support

S.B. 86 – AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR HOUSING RESOURCES FOR THE HOMELESS AND TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

S.B. 804 – AN ACT CONCERNING INCLUSION IN CERTAIN COMMUNITIES

H.B. 5681 – AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL OPPORTUNITY REIMBURSEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

H.B. 6239 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING FUNDING ALLOCATION AND SEGREGATION

H.B. 6240 – AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY PROPERTIES

H.B. 6430 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION

H.B. 6431 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED PERSONS

H.B. 6432 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY APPLICATION PROCEDURES

H.B. 6433 – AN ACT CONCERNING INSPECTIONS OF RENTAL PROPERTY PRIOR TO OCCUPANCY OR TERMINATION, LATE RENTAL PAYMENTS AND DESIGNATION OF A RENTAL HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

H.B. 6436 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OPEND CHOICE VOUCHERS PILOT PROGRAM

H.B. 6437 AN ACT REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO NOTIFY TENANTS OF FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS

Oppose

H.B. 5683 – AN ACT CONCERNING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

H.B. 5686 – AN ACT CONCERNING COVID-19 RELATED PROTECTIONS FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, honorable ranking members and members of the committee, my name is Christie Stewart. I am the director of Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity, an organization which facilitates the intentional production, preservation, and protection of a full spectrum of housing that fosters communities of opportunity for all Fairfield County residents. A strategic partnership between Fairfield County's Community Foundation, Partnership for Strong Communities, Regional Plan Association and Supportive Housing Works, FCCHO utilizes a collaborative, data-driven framework, aligning regional resources to deliver impactful systems change and equitable housing solutions. Thank for you the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of the following bills.

S.B. 86 – AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR HOUSING RESOURCES FOR THE HOMELESS AND TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS



We support the addition of funding of \$2.3 million annually for the Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1. These funds are crucial to advancing our statewide efforts to end homelessness. From October 2019 to October 2020, 2-1-1, the state's human service information and referral helpline, received 74,852 calls related to temporary shelter. 2-1-1 referred 16,452 households seeking housing services and supports to one of seven Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) which serve all individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness across the state. The CAN infrastructure greatly reduces duplication and provides efficient assistance to households via a single point of entry, unified assessment, diversion, prioritization, and matching to appropriate and available housing resources. The CAN system allows our communities to respond better to client needs, and to assign services and housing more effectively and efficiently, including to those with the most severe and complex needs.

Our CAN's need stable, consistent funding. Although our CAN system in Connecticut is cited as a national model, it is funded largely through philanthropic contributions and small amounts of administrative funds through other services. The state funding that has come to CANs has come from Community Investment Act funds administered at the discretion of the Department of Housing. **Without a stable funding source, CANs are often forced to lay-off staff while awaiting new funding, leading to gaps in service coverage and longer wait times for intake assessments for those experiencing homelessness.**

Ensuring that our CANs continue to have the resources they need to do this work, ensures that when Connecticut residents do find themselves in a housing emergency, that they will be aided in a swift, cost-effective way to achieve permanent housing stability.

S.B. 804 – AN ACT CONCERNING INCLUSION IN CERTAIN COMMUNITIES

We support in concept the provisions of S.B. 804. In particular, we believe more broadly permitting accessory dwelling apartments and middle housing types across the state and requiring training of land use commissioners will bring incremental and necessary improvement to housing affordability in Connecticut. Accessory dwellings and multi-family homes are lower cost housing types that fill an important role in expanding affordable housing choices for many Connecticut families.

H.B. 5681 – AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL OPPORTUNITY REIMBURSEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

We support linking educational opportunity to affordable housing opportunity by rewarding municipalities that adopt inclusive zoning policies and build affordable housing. **For municipalities that meet the inclusive requirements, the bill provides a higher overall school construction grant than the municipality would otherwise receive.**

An inclusive municipality is one that has a local zoning ordinance that affirmatively furthers fair housing and permits multifamily housing, mixed-use development, and accessory dwellings. In other words, the town allows for the creation of a variety of modest housing choices. In addition, the municipality must demonstrate that its stock of affordable housing has grown.

It makes sense to incentivize municipalities to enact inclusive zoning policies. These policies enable students from lower-income families to live in more communities with high-performing schools, allow many



Connecticut towns to benefit from a more diverse community, and provide towns with well-documented economic gains of increased housing options.

H.B. 6239 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING FUNDING ALLOCATION AND SEGREGATION

We support requiring the Department of Housing to gather data to determine whether state housing funding and awards affect racial and economic segregation. As the Department continues to manage the housing crisis brought on by the pandemic, we ask that the bill also consider additional funding to the Department of Housing to provide staffing adequate to complete the studies.

H.B. 6240 – AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY PROPERTIES

We support the state providing a payment in lieu of taxes to municipalities for State Housing Authority properties, paid at one hundred per cent of the amount of property taxes that would have otherwise been paid. It is no secret that the affordable housing needs in our state far exceed the available supply of deed-restricted affordable housing units. Communities that step up and supply our state with that much needed resource, should not be penalized by also having to take forgo local property tax revenue.

Affordable housing is a state need and should be a state priority. PILOT payments to municipalities who do their part must be considered as part of the investment the state must make. Not doing so is yet another example of the state not meeting its contractual obligations to our cities and communities of color, and specifically those communities that are supporting services such as affordable housing that support housing needs of entire regions. It is not just unfair; it's inequitable.

H.B. 6430 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION

We support permitting public housing authorities the discretion to expand their jurisdiction to provide their residents housing options in high and very high opportunity communities. We support policies, like this bill, that increase housing choice and mobility for residents, as well expand access to jobs, a diversity of neighborhoods, and schools. Most housing authority residents are people of color that live in areas of higher poverty. Increasing community choice for housing authority program participants is a positive step toward increasing the racial and economic diversity of Connecticut's municipalities.

H.B. 6431 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED PERSONS

We support efforts to ease barriers to safe, stable housing for people exiting the criminal justice system. Multiple data analyses have shown that the number of people who experience homelessness who have also touched the criminal justice system nears 50%. Moreover, people of color are disproportionately convicted of criminal offenses, and thus disproportionately face additional barriers to housing upon exiting the criminal justice system. Policies to ease those barriers are positive steps in the right direction and could lead to a decrease in homelessness and housing instability for this vulnerable population.

H.B. 6432 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY APPLICATION PROCEDURES



H.B. 6433 – AN ACT CONCERNING INSPECTIONS OF RENTAL PROPERTY PRIOR TO OCCUPANCY OR TERMINATION, LATE RENTAL PAYMENTS AND DESIGNATION OF A RENTAL HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

We support H.B. 6432 and H.B. 6433 as improvements to tenant protections and lessening of barriers to access housing in the state. H.B. 6432 requires housing authorities to provide rental applications through a variety of means beyond in person, including by mail, email, and via website. H.B. 6433 creates a Rental Housing Ombudsman within the Department of Housing to assist tenants with complaints of unsanitary or dangerous conditions in a rental home. We support providing dedicated staffing to supporting tenants' rights at DOH. We ask that the bill also include adequate funding to support the new position of ombudsman. *[WAITING FOR MORE INFORMATION FROM PARTNERS TO COMPLETE.]*

H.B. 6436 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OPEN CHOICE VOUCHERS PILOT PROGRAM

We support expanding opportunities for students to move to the town in which they are educated. Many families who participate in the Open Choice program struggle to connect to the communities in which their children are attending school. Their kids endure long bus rides every day and are much less likely to benefit from after school and extracurricular activities. We believe this bill would help alleviate those issues for parents that would like to live in the communities in which their children attend school but are otherwise unable to afford housing in the community.

H.B. 6437 - AN ACT REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO NOTIFY TENANTS OF FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS

Low-income tenants are disproportionately affected when their housing is subject to foreclosure proceedings. We support policies, like this bill, that protect low-income residents from becoming homeless or unstably housed. *[WAITING FOR MORE INFORMATION FROM PARTNERS TO COMPLETE.]*

H.B. 5683 – AN ACT CONCERNING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We oppose H.B. 5683 as this bill would severely weaken the Affordable Housing Appeals Act (Section 8-30g) by allowing market rate housing to be included in the 10% count for exemption of towns from 8-30g. The 10% count is a limited count of subsidized and deed-restricted housing units. It is not a count of all moderately-priced housing units because housing affordability cannot be counted without knowing the income of the occupants AND the corresponding rent or theoretical sales price. This information simply does not exist for every housing unit in the state. Most importantly, attempting to count market rate homes as affordable offers no guarantee to the state's supply of affordable housing because these homes contain no protections for long-term affordability. Section 8-30g must continue to rely on an accounting of homes with specific restrictions and subsidies, not on a theoretical calculation of affordability.

To ensure Connecticut's supply of affordable homes is protected, we must continue to count as "affordable" for purposes of Section 8-30g only those homes that have restrictions or subsidies in place that limit the cost of the housing to eligible occupants, whether public housing, deed restricted homes, homes with CHFA mortgages or occupants with housing vouchers.



H.B. 5686 – AN ACT CONCERNING COVID-19 RELATED PROTECTIONS FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

This bill would seriously weaken the existing eviction moratorium by changing the structure of the moratorium from automatic to one that requires a request to the court by each tenant while expanding exceptions to the moratorium weakening the purpose of a broad-based moratorium during the pandemic. With tenants having to defend every case (likely without the assistance of counsel), the courts would be overburdened.

H.B. 5686 limits the moratorium to COVID-19 related circumstances. This change would transform the structure of the state moratorium from one that functions automatically to one based on an examination of each individual case. The existing federal CDC moratorium operates in this way, and based on this experience, few tenants would be able to obtain the modified state eviction moratorium's intended protection, including a large number of tenants adversely affected by the pandemic. We believe the primary goal of the existing moratorium is to prevent tenant housing instability during an unprecedented health crisis. The changes proposed in H.B. 5386 risks exposing tenants to eviction even as the pandemic continues.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.