

March 8th, 2021

TESTIMONY **OPPOSING HB 6570** - AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AND MUNICIPAL ZONING

Chairman Lemar and Chairman Haskell, Ranking Members and Esteemed Members of the Transportation Committee. I am Janet Cling of Darien.

*I am testifying today **in opposition of Bills HB 6570**. I am supportive of Affordable Housing, but I feel that this bill will not achieve the goal of increasing affordable housing. However, it will lead to the cancelation of residents' voice. I have familiarized myself with DesegregateCT's (DCT) platforms, and actually support their ADU and training of P&Z commission ideas, but the idea of BY RIGHT permitting, which is bypassing Local Planning and Zoning commissioners that we have elected to represent us is a major problem. I want to explain why it's both dangerous and ineffective in addressing the affordable housing inventory.*

The argument that developers should follow a less onerous process than the one currently in use is misguided. Some of CT's towns do not even have zoning regulations, but this hasn't spurred development in these locations when they could have built under 8-30g. These developers have actively chosen not to build because there is less or sometimes zero profit to be made in AH. From what I understand from friends in the building industry, builders in fact could lose a lot of money building AH. AH is so expensive to build because Return on Investment is so low, that it's rarely economically viable and is in a forever state of subsidy by the State.

In Darien, where I live, we've implemented INCLUSIONARY zoning where developers are required to build 12% below-market rate units (aka Affordable) when they build more than 5 units. However, I do not see such affordability requirements in this bill for developers. This hints at the fact that authors of this bill and the DesegregateCT movement understand that developers are driven by profit margin, and they are themselves worried about "scaring off" developers from actually pursuing these projects if they included language requiring actual below-market rate units to be provided. DesegregateCT's representatives claim that "with more housing supply, prices will come down". That is a disingenuous statement because we know it will NOT come down far enough to be affordable by low income families, yet it will depress property values of neighboring single family homes just enough to eviscerate Fairfield County's land wealth. When that happens, property tax receipts will be reduced so we will be forced to raise mill rates to obtain the same level of property taxes, and that will further harm the few low-income families that managed to obtain affordable housing in these towns.

Also the assumption that low-income families don't need to drive when they live close to the train is wrong. Metro North Rail ticket prices are very expensive and frequency of routes are not nearly flexible enough to meet the needs of Low Income workers. I assume everyone on this committee knows Governor Lamont's latest budget plan has a combined 82million \$ of savings over two years from 2022 to 2023, from "reducing bus and rail services". That is a lionshare of the efficiencies he's seeking. How does this committee plan to reconcile that reduction in services with Transit-Oriented Development that this bill allows BY-RIGHT.

Without an affordability requirement in this bill, the only people that can afford to actually live in these units are young professionals without kids, empty nesters downgrading from their single family homes who were already living in these towns, as opposed to bringing in outside low-income families. I fear that we are simply transferring control and wealth from local taxpayers to developers. Removing the vetting of local planning & zoning boards who conduct extensive impact analysis on each town's infrastructure and services and potentially impose fees to address these issues. It is very concerning that the State would

take such a heavy-handed approach on local residents in mandating that we turn control over to the building industry without any guarantee to actually benefit low income families.

As an immigrant from China, I can speak for all who are still trapped in a Communist society, that to be able to exercise our right in a public hearing like the one we're in right now is exactly the individual freedom protection that attracts millions of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. each year. It's very important we continue to stand-up for that protection that really starts at the individual and local level, as I'm sure our State leadership would agree that CT would want to have the same level of protection from any federal overreach. This is what makes America the number one destination for immigration globally.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Janet Cling
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