

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HB-6831:
AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSIT-ORIENTED COMMUNITIES.

Planning and Development Committee

February 3, 2025

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Rahman and Kavros DeGraw, Ranking Members Gordon and Zullo, Vice Chairs Needleman and Chafee, and all other Members of the Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan, a resident of Stratford, and the Director of Policy and Civic Engagement for the Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition, a network of five StriveTogether partnerships committed to improving economic mobility for Connecticut's youth and families—Bridgeport Prospers, Danbury Collective, Norwalk ACTS, Stamford Cradle to Career, and Waterbury Bridge to Success. I am testifying on behalf of the Coalition, and we call upon the Committee to support *HB-6831: An Act Concerning Transit-Oriented Communities*.

We advocate for legislative solutions that address systemic inequities, enhance education and workforce development, and expand healthcare access, consistently promoting policy solutions that consider, if not address, youth disconnection. Because we recognize that many issues in the legislature connect to the well-being and success of children and families, we champion comprehensive, cross-sector solutions that build a stronger, more resilient Connecticut.

Historically, exclusionary zoning has caused our state to remain one of the most racially and economically segregated in the country, with devastating consequences.¹ Connecticut is also known as the land of steady habits, where our primary local government unit are the towns themselves. Attempting to modify zoning regulations from Hartford is not known as an easy lift and this bill does not mandate anything; it is an opt-in process.

The legislature is focusing on the housing crisis, workforce development, and the need for more equitable, affordable—at all income levels—and environmentally-sustainable land use policies in Connecticut with a sense of urgency. It is time to promote zoning that serves all in our communities for the future health and growth of our state.

It may be commonly known that housing is a crucial social determinant of health and education with more affordable housing resulting in improved community health and better educational and

¹ Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. (2021). *Connecticut Zoning and Discrimination 2021*. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/CHRO/Publications/CHROs-Zoning-and-Discrimination-2021-Report.pdf>.



The Danbury Collective



Norwalk ACTS



economic outcomes. Transportation is also a social determinant of health, and **the one** which impacts every other one by either providing or impeding consistent and reliable access to various food options, health care and pharmacies, employment and education, and social connections.

In 2019, Kaiser Permanente² surveyed people across the country about their social needs, categorized by housing, transportation, food security, and relationships. A key takeaway was the **holistic view of health** – it isn't the doctor visit only. While 92% of respondents believe access to doctors is important to overall health, both stable housing and reliable transportation, at 89% and 80% respectively, also ranked particularly important. Of additional significance is that these survey responses transcend demographics of age, income, race, or gender.

In an article about Covid and health disparities in March 2022, leaders of community health center providers and advocates said the biggest part of health is social and behavioral, based on “*where you live, where you breathe*” and as the health systems learned to apply a public health and equity lens, removing “*the economic and structural barriers to care, then you can focus on the work of where people live, work, [and] play.*”³

Transit-oriented development and transit-oriented communities drive sustainable economic growth, environmental health, social equity, and deliver significant health benefits. Moreover, they strengthen our civic infrastructure, with vibrant, connected neighborhoods that enhance social cohesion, foster a sense of belonging, and boost mental and emotional well-being. All of this contributes to healthier, more resilient communities where economic opportunities, environmental sustainability, and quality of life thrive.

The Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition urges you to pass HB-6831 out of Committee.

With respect and gratitude for your service and consideration,

Kathleen Callahan
CT Cradle to Career Coalition
Policy and Civic Engagement Director
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² Kaiser Permanente. (2019, June). *Social Needs in America Survey Key Findings*. Retrieved from <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/content/dam/internet/kp/comms/import/uploads/2019/06/KP-Social-Needs-Survey-Key-Findings.pdf>.

³ Fenster, J. N. (2022, March). *Experts: COVID was ‘an awakening’ to health disparities in CT. What has been done to fix issues?* Retrieved from <https://www.ctinsider.com/news/article/Experts-COVID-was-an-awakening-to-health-16996835.php>.



The Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition is a statewide collaborative uniting five StriveTogether partnerships serving 125,000 children across Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk, Stamford, and Waterbury. Through a collective impact approach and with fifteen community-based working groups and over 440 partner organizations, we work to advance policies and systems that ensure all children and families in Connecticut have access to equitable opportunities from early childhood through career success.



The Danbury Collective



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