PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

Partnership for Strong Communities promotes equitable change in Connecticut housing policy by coordinating advocacy, advancing research, and uniting diverse partners

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE
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PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

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S.B. No. 1252 AN ACT ESTABLISHING PRIORITY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ZONES.

Representative Felipe, Senator Marx, Representative Scott, Senator Sampson and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I am Sean Ghio, Policy Director at Partnership for Strong Communities – a statewide nonprofit research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice.

A thriving housing market that supports affordability and accessibility is essential to the well-being of our families, the strength of our economy, and the overall quality of life in our state. We appreciate Governor Lamont's continued focus on Connecticut's housing needs, and we support the engagement and collaboration of builders and municipal leaders which is critical to achieving an adequate and diverse affordable housing supply in our state.

We have concerns that the bill would allow municipalities to qualify for a moratorium from the state's Affordable Housing Appeals Act through modest local zoning changes without requiring the actual production of affordable housing. The current law grants moratoriums based on the construction of affordable homes, ensuring that communities contribute meaningfully to housing access. As written, S.B. 1252 would lower the threshold to achieve a moratorium through zoning regulation modifications alone – even without affordable housing being built. Section 8-30g is one of the state's only tools for expanding affordable housing in communities that do not otherwise permit it. **We ask that the bill be amended to remove Section 8-30g moratorium changes as an incentive.**

If Connecticut is serious about expanding housing opportunities, we must provide municipalities with incentives that both encourage participation and result in the creation of affordable homes. Instead of tying incentives to weakening Section 8-30g, we encourage the committee to consider stronger and more effective incentives.

The program could be attractive to more municipalities if greater incentives were offered, such as **per unit incentive payments** or **priority in certain discretionary grant applications**. We fully support the incentives offered in HB 6831 – the Work Live Ride bill – to zone for more homes in areas with existing transit and infrastructure. H.B. 6494 would establish a Housing Growth Fund to provide grants to municipalities to incentivize the production of affordable housing.

Criteria for participation in the housing priority development program should include evidence of actions taken by the applicant to reduce barriers to housing construction in the municipality beyond the modest density modifications required in the bill. At a minimum, municipalities should demonstrate in their application that the town's zoning regulations conform to the requirements of the Zoning Enabling Act, specifically Section 8-2(d).

Section 8-2(d) lists elements that "shall not" be included in municipal zoning regulations. Unfortunately, there is no system of compliance. In a series of articles on affordable housing in CT Mirror, Attorney Timothy Hollister noted, "there are still more than 20 towns that ban multi-family housing, and dozens that require substantial minimum apartment unit or house sizes without regard to occupancy." This is despite Section 8-2(d) explicitly prohibiting these and other policies. At a minimum, participation in the housing priority development zone program should require that the applicant's zoning regulations do not violate their enabling statute.

Recognizing that municipalities vary in many ways, such as land area, topography, housing needs, access to infrastructure, and housing markets, we ask that the committee consider changing the application process to allow for negotiation between the municipality and Department of Housing (DOH) on the specifics of a zoning overlay with the understanding that the densities proposed in S.B. 1252 should be considered a minimum. The area of the zoning overlay, the densities permitted, the number and type of affordable set-asides required, all these factors could be negotiated between the municipality and DOH at application and determine the level and types of incentives that are available.

We believe these amendments would strengthen S.B. 1252, making participation in the housing priority development zone program more attractive to municipalities and more likely to create more of the housing that are state so desperately needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.