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 VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2025

Senator Honig, Representative Foster, Senator Gordon, Representative Anderson and distinguished members of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 1277. I am Alysha Gardner, Senior Policy Analyst with the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are 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.

We respectfully request that the committee oppose SB 1277:

The Partnership for Strong Communities supports appropriate policy measures to support veterans in accessing housing that is safe, stable, and affordable; however, **modifying the 8-30g statute would be unlikely to create any meaningful change toward addressing homelessness and the housing cost burden of veterans.**

SB 1277 seeks to modify the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure, also referred to as 8-30g, which supports CT's fair housing laws by allowing low- to moderate-income housing developers to challenge a town's failure to approve their housing proposal. Developers may only challenge municipalities who already lack sufficient affordable housing, defined as 10% or more of their housing units that are assisted by state or federal funds or otherwise have deed restrictions limiting the cost to low- and moderate-income tenants and owners.

SB1277 seeks to modify the moratorium procedure by awarding "points" to housing units whose occupancy is restricted to low- and moderate-income senior and disabled veterans. **This bill does not create new units, nor provides incentives for the creation of new units for veterans;** rather, it would allow municipalities to value existing affordable units more than other affordable units and empowers towns to further restrict the construction of new, affordable housing units available to unhoused or cost-burdened veterans. **This bill will ultimately benefit towns with low levels of affordable housing, not veterans.**

Furthermore, the bill as currently written is fundamentally incompatible within the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure framework. 8-30g designates "points" for housing units with specific deed restrictions based on income requirements, supporting **long-term affordability restrictions** for eligible low- and moderate-income restricted units. This bill attempts to award "points" based on characteristics of the tenant, not legal restrictions of the unit. **Awarding points for tenant characteristics, such as veteran status, is difficult to measure and enforce over time**. It is unlikely that private housing providers would be willing to create these types of long-term (40 year) deed restrictions limited to veterans only, and government-assisted veterans-only complexes are already awarded points under 8-30g. Therefore, it is unclear whether any municipalities would even be able to apply for 8-30g "points" toward their 10% threshold under this legislation.

There are other proven policies to support veterans in a housing crisis that members of this committee, and other supporters of this bill, could prioritize. One key program is the CT Department of Housing's (DOH) State Rental Assistance Program (RAP), which provides housing vouchers for households experiencing housing instability. RAP voucher holders live in private units and cap their rental payments at 30-40% of their income, with the state covering the balance of payment. **Unlike 8-30g, which focuses on housing units, the RAP program provides vouchers to residents based on both income and personal characteristics, including veteran status. CT has set aside 100 vouchers specifically for veterans, a number which has not increased since the set-aside's inception in 2015.** To support cost-burdened and homeless veterans, members of this committee could **support funding requests for the Rental Assistance Program** by raising baseline investments to keep pace with rent increases and investing additional resources in creating new vouchers to serve more veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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