TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
SEAN GHIO, POLICY DIRECTOR
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
MARCH 10, 2025

SUPPORT:

H.B. 7062 – AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY SHELTER UNITS FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR REFUGEES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS LOCATED ON REAL PROPERTY OWNED BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.

Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, Senator Gordon, Representative Zullo, Representative Chafee, Senator Needleman and distinguished members of the Planning & Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am Sean Ghio, Policy Director with the 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.

We respectfully request that the committee support H.B. 7062.

Connecticut has a gap of over 92,000 affordable homes available to extremely low-income renter households. There are only 34 affordable and available homes for every 100 households with incomes at or below 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

Connecticut has also seen a 13% rise in homelessness in the last year. More than 5,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness in Connecticut. Allowing for the installation of temporary shelter units for those experiencing the crisis of homelessness on real property owned by religious organizations is one way to ensure those in the most vulnerable, unstable situations have access to shelter.

Many faith-based institutions have excess, underused space on their properties such as parking lots that could serve as a valuable site for temporary shelter, particularly during the winter months. At present, zoning laws across the state often hinder this kind of creative solution to the housing crisis. When service providers connected with churches in the past in search of sites to

host local warming centers, it was the zoning code restrictions that prevented them from being able to provide additional temporary shelter options for their community.

Additionally, we would like to see the bill include language that would require churches to engage in active partnerships with their regional Coordinated Access Network (CAN) to help connect those seeking shelter to our statewide homeless response system.

Connecticut has an opportunity, and the responsibility, to confront the dual crises facing our state: the economic challenges of a housing market that that has long since moved past the edges of affordability and is now completely out of reach for thousands, and the human toll of housing instability and homelessness that threatens the very fabric of our communities.

While this alone will not address the shortage of available, affordable housing options in the state, it will help give those who may have nowhere else to go a safe place to be while they work to get back on their feet.

Underused land owned by religious organizations could also serve as a critical resource for affordable housing development. By allowing these institutions to build housing on their properties without unnecessary zoning barriers, we can unlock desperately needed homes for low- and moderate-income families, seniors, and essential workers.

Faith communities have long played a vital role in addressing social challenges, including homelessness and poverty. Permitting them to develop affordable housing aligns with their mission to serve their communities while also providing stable, safe homes for those in need. States like California and Washington have already embraced this approach, demonstrating that, with appropriate safeguards ensuring affordability, allowing religious organizations to develop housing is a common-sense, compassionate, and effective strategy to address the housing crisis. It is time to support policies that empower faith-based organizations to be part of the solution.

Thank you for considering this testimony.