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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H.B. 7112 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS AND THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

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 Chelsea Ross, Executive 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.

We respectfully request the committee to support H.B. 7112 with one suggested amendment. This is a forward-thinking bill that takes key steps to address Connecticut's ongoing housing affordability crisis. It will increase affordable housing supply, provide critical support to vulnerable populations, and encourage equitable housing development through financial incentives, infrastructure improvements, and regulatory modifications. Taken together, this set of policies will ease Connecticut's housing affordability crisis while ensuring that our housing policies are inclusive and equitable.

We support the rental assistance program modifications proposed in the bill as they will help ensure that low-income families can access safe and affordable housing in high-opportunity areas. Adjusting rental assistance values to reflect real market conditions will expand choices for families, reduce housing segregation, and improve economic mobility.

We strongly support the bill's new funding for affordable housing and rental assistance through:

- Increasing bond authorizations for the Community Investment Fund by $500 million over the next 5 fiscal years for affordable housing development with $250 million to be used in projects with project labor agreements.

- Authorizing $50 million in grant funding to support public housing authorities in predevelopment, acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of middle housing development.
- Appropriating $2,230,000 to the Department of Housing for a direct rental assistance pilot program for up to 150 recipients that are currently on the Housing Choice Voucher Program waitlist.

These investments should be paired with additional investment in the Rental Assistance Program and expanding bond funding for affordable housing development would have a significant impact on the housing affordability crisis Connecticut families are facing.

We support tasking the majority leaders' roundtable group on affordable housing with studying innovative policies such as an affordable housing real estate investment trust, an appraisal gap funding program for housing rehabilitation, rental savings accounts, a rental payments tax credit program, and extreme temperature protocols to protect persons experiencing homelessness. Given these new duties, the roundtable would benefit from additional expertise in its membership. **We ask the committee to consider amending the membership of the majority leaders' roundtable** as described in P.A. 23-207 Section 36(b) to include a member with expertise in affordable housing development through experience with community development corporations, a member from a community development finance institution, and a member with homeless services system expertise.

We support the sewer system infrastructure support program included in this bill. It encourages municipalities to align their sewer planning with the expansion of multifamily housing. In many communities, inadequate sewer infrastructure is a major obstacle to housing development. By providing targeted funding and support to municipalities and affordable housing developers, the state can remove this barrier and promote the development of diverse, higher-density affordable housing that meet the needs of our changing population. This program complements the policies of H.B. 6831- the Work Live Ride Act to connect more people to more jobs through greater access to transit, and expand existing mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods.

We support the inclusion of several provisions in the bill to protect people experiencing homelessness including the prohibition of hostile architecture in public spaces, studying the

benefits of creating extreme temperature protocols, and the pilot program to provide basic facilities for showering and laundry.

H.B. 7112 takes meaningful steps to not only protect people experiencing homelessness but also to prevent homelessness in the first place. We strongly urge the Housing Committee to support this bill as it will enable real progress in stopping our state's housing challenges and creating a Connecticut where every resident has access to a safe, stable, and affordable home.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.