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 PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2025

Senator Herron, Representative Boyd, Senator Cicarella, Representative Howard, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. 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 **HB 7119 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE FIRE PREVENTION CODE, STATE FIRE SAFETY CODE, STATE BUILDING CODE AND ELEVATOR INSPECTIONS.**

We are concerned with the language prepared in Section 10 of the bill, which will allow for the creation of "stretch codes." Stretch codes would allow municipalities to adopt a building code with more stringent energy efficiency requirements that set different building standards for the municipality than what is approved in the statewide building code. The inclusion of stretch codes in Connecticut's State Building Code will negatively impact the construction of new market-rate and affordable housing in Connecticut through a trifecta of channels:

(1) More stringent environmental standards and building regulations can increase the baseline costs of new home construction;
(2) A patchwork of building code regulations across municipalities would create uncertainty and a lack of uniformity for planning purposes, making the state unfriendly to prospective builders; and,
(3) Municipalities that have demonstrated a commitment to preventing new home construction, especially affordable housing, may impose stretch codes for the purpose of preventing the construction of needed housing, rather than to promote the construction of environmentally friendly housing.

Our neighboring state, Massachusetts, has implemented legislation allowing stretch codes with predictable negative outcomes on housing supply and affordability. A 2023 study released by the MIT Center for Real Estate Research[1] found that the adoption of stretch codes negatively impacted housing affordability in the state. When a municipality adopted the Stretch Energy Code, all homes in a localized housing market (including those outside the municipality) were impacted because of the dampening impact on housing construction. **The average sale price of all homes in a local housing market rose by 4.5% upon a single municipality's adoption of the Stretch Energy Code, with a 3.5% increase in price for multi-family homes and a 5.7% increase in price for single family homes.** As an explanation for this price jump, the researchers find that when towns adopt the Stretch Energy Code, **there is a 9% decrease in new housing construction starts in the community.**

Massachusetts acknowledges the negative impact of stretch codes on affordable housing construction and targets specific state and federal construction subsidies for affordable housing developments in municipalities that adopt these enhanced environmental standards. In the absence of such programs, the impact on housing cost and availability in Massachusetts would certainly be greater than the estimates found in the 2023 study. **SB 7119 does not provide affordable housing incentives and offsets; if Connecticut were to pass the legislation as written, the negative impacts on the housing industry in our state would certainly be greater than the known negative impacts on our neighboring state.**

Connecticut is in an affordable housing crisis, lacking around 92,000 homes affordable to extremely low-income families. Our state has been rated the worst in the nation for renters due to a combination of high unemployment and low apartment availability. **At this moment of crisis, the General Assembly should not adopt new building code regulations that are credibly known to increase the cost of housing and decrease the amount of new construction.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Alysha Gardner
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[1] Muzio, M, Dongxiao, N, Steil, J, and Zheng, S. "Understanding Housing Market Responses to Stringent Energy Codes." *MIT Center for Real Estate Research (October 2023).*