



## **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony**

### **Senate Bill 169, An Act Concerning a Study of the Effects of Affordable Housing Policies in the State**

#### **Housing Committee**

**March 2, 2022**

Good evening, Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on Senate Bill 169, An Act Concerning a Study of the Effects of Affordable Housing Policies in the State.**

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets. Over the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$97 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$894 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to **increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods.** Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

The Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods both by increasing the opportunities in Hartford neighborhoods and by increasing the ability of Hartford residents to choose to move to other higher opportunity areas throughout the Greater Hartford region. In order to support these outcomes, the Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods. COVID has reinforced the need for all of us to live in safe, stable homes, in safe, stable neighborhoods, in safe, stable communities.

Public commitment must address the interplay of basic human needs, including access to food, mental and physical health care services, housing and other needs, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations providing these services.

Healthy communities need a diversity of people and housing to thrive, but Connecticut's towns are becoming even less diverse. In fact, our cities and towns have become increasingly racially and economically segregated. Two of every three persons of color in Connecticut live in just 15 of the state's 169 towns. Connecticut is the 15th most racially segregated state in the nation and the most racially segregated state in New England. Exclusionary zoning practices have fostered this segregation for decades which has had devastating consequences on residents, communities, and our state's economy.



We know that the vast majority of deed restricted affordable housing, as well as naturally occurring affordable housing (such as multi-family homes and apartment buildings) are concentrated in urban areas such as Hartford. This segregation of housing results in concentration of poverty, primarily impacting Black and Latino communities. The Hartford Foundation supports efforts to generate diverse housing, including more affordable housing, in higher opportunity areas throughout the state, providing residents with more choices about where to live.

Hartford residents that wish to move to neighboring communities do not often get that choice. In 2019 the Hartford Foundation provided a grant to support residents in Clay Arsenal Apartments, Barber Gardens, and Infill in Hartford who wanted to move to areas of opportunity. All three complexes had their contracts with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development terminated due to conditions that threatened residents' health and safety. The Foundation awarded grants to the Center for Leadership and Justice and Open Communities Alliance; both organizations worked with tenants to provide leadership training, legal assistance, and technical advice to navigate the complex housing situation and relocation process. Of the 150 Clay Arsenal families who were relocated, 61 percent wanted to move to Hartford suburbs including West Hartford, Glastonbury, and Windsor. However, the timing of the relocation process and lack of affordable housing options in communities outside of Hartford meant that most families had to relocate to housing in the same, or similar, segregated neighborhoods.

The lack of housing diversity—including affordable housing in suburban communities—has existed for generations. In 1989, the legislature took the wise step of enacting the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure (referred to by its statutory citation as “8-30g”) to ensure that suburban towns recognized their responsibility to make housing more affordable to people of diverse incomes, including essential workers, young families and senior citizens. Despite claims to the contrary, 8-30g has had success, leading to the creation of more than 7,500 affordable housing units across the state. It moved towns to develop thousands more homes for residents who otherwise would not have had the opportunities those homes have provided.

Section 8-30g does not represent an unfair intrusion on local zoning authority as it does not require any town to build housing. The regulation simply ensures that when a developer proposes building inclusionary housing, a town must show good reasons for objecting to it. Many Connecticut towns are failing to provide residents with the type of smaller, denser, affordable homes within walking distance to stores, services and public transit that the state needs to thrive.

As we have seen with the Clay Arsenal example, Section 8-30g is not a panacea but represents a vital tool to promote the development of more affordable homes to ensure resident choice in housing. As we look to develop additional policies to expand access to affordable housing throughout the state, Section 8-30g helps to ensure that a town cannot avoid affordable housing development by enacting exclusionary local zoning policies or cite a lack of demand for housing. Furthermore, towns looking to develop affordable housing can achieve a four-year moratorium from Section 8-30g. This provides municipalities the time to create their own plans to develop affordable housing without state involvement. Towns that fail to achieve these goals should not be looking to overturn effective state policy, but rather work to improve their local regulations.



The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut families have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfpg.org](mailto:policy@hfpg.org) or 860-548-1888.