

Written testimony submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Housing Committee in support of HB 6633: AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Fr Michael Johnson. I am a resident of Hartford the Executive Director of the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry and a member of St Patrick St Anthony Church. My congregation is affiliated with the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), a broad-based organization of 49 faith institutions working together on this issue.

I am writing in support of HB 6633 Connecticut faces both an affordable housing and segregation crisis. We like to think of ours as a progressive state that values equal opportunity for all. But the unfortunate truth is that we are the 8th least affordable state in the nation and with high levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation. While there are many causes behind this, a huge part of these inequities stems from exclusionary zoning laws: a hyperlocal land use regime designed to prevent new housing development, exclude newcomers, and create a scarcity of homes. These laws enrich incumbent property owners and preserve their exclusive access to schools and other amenities, at the expense of all other residents. These challenges are taking a significant toll on the state's families and our budget. We need a new strategy. "Fair Share" housing can put our state on the road to greater equity and economic vitality by allocating to each town in Connecticut an appropriate share of affordable housing that considers town resources and ensures municipal vibrancy.

There are several main reasons to pass the bill: Our state suffers from a "severe lack of affordable housing," local zoning methods have led to heightened segregation, and lack of affordable housing causes economic harm. There aren't enough homes for workers, and when people are spending more of their income on housing, they can't build wealth and boost the local economy. If there are not affordable places for people to live. That makes an area less attractive to businesses contemplating relocating to Connecticut and less sustainable for existing businesses to continue/stay.

Connecticut lacks nearly 87,000 units of housing that are affordable and available to extremely low income renters, according to estimates from the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#). Our people recognize this situation and want to see action taken by our lawmakers. 78% of those asked in a survey last month "How affordable is housing in CT?" answered unaffordable in a survey commissioned by [Growing Together CT](#), a consortium of organizations coordinated by [Open Communities Alliance](#). The poll, conducted by Embold Research, found substantial support for the notion that "there should be housing options in every town for residents of all incomes" (73% of respondents), "when towns won't act to make housing more affordable, the state

government should so that Connecticut doesn't get too expensive for everyone" (61% of respondents). The poll also revealed broad-based support for creating new housing to prevent housing displacement and suburban sprawl while reducing the overall cost of housing, encouraging walkability, creating more mixed-income communities (66%), creating racially diverse communities (65%).

As to the last question on creating racially diverse communities. Some people see change as a threat-the fear that things will be different in our community if this legislation is passed. It is important to remember that change can be positive. How does racial/cultural/economic diversity enrich a community? It helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups. In addition, cultural diversity helps us recognize and respect "ways of being" that are not necessarily our own. So that as we interact with others, we can build bridges to trust, respect, and understanding across cultures-something our country desperately needs during this "hinge" time. In educational environments, cultural diversity benefits everyone. It paves the way to better problem-solving, more empathy and compassion, deepened learning, and approaches the world from various perspectives. Earlier exposure to diversity helps prepares all our children to navigate and thrive in this multicultural world they will inherit. It helps teaches them to work together to solve the myriad of problems they will inherit for older generations.

When I attended school in the suburbs in the sixties and seventies, my classmates all looked like me-white. In my high school of 2,000, there were only three youths of color. Reflecting back, I grew up with biases formed out of ignorance. These biases were later challenges when I would form relationships with people of color and were shattered when I was made pastor of a church in the DC suburbs that had 4,500 people in the pews on any given weekend from 100 different countries. Diversity came with challenges at times, but learning to listen to one another's stories of our respective journeys helped us to move from seeing people with differences as the "others" to seeing them as a sisters and brothers. It is important for us to not fear diversity, but to embrace it for the richness it offers to us and especially our children.

Our children will benefit from having more diverse classmates and friends. I founded a school in 2010 that was very racially and economically diverse. During my time in administration, I saw how growing up with diversity enriched our children.

- It helps rules out the prejudices in their minds and broadens their perspectives helps them learn to accept and respect others' cultures.
- It helps pupils to break the stereotypes that exist in society. Students are inspired to establish a safer society for everyone.
- It makes them informed individuals and "be the change" they want to see in the world.

- Cultural differences nurture critical thinking among students to understand others' worldviews.

Fair share makes sense environmentally as well. Restrictive zoning laws contribute to car-dependency and suburban sprawl. Mandating parking for every development and banning mixed-use buildings forces homes and businesses to be spread out from each other. This has numerous negative environmental and economic effects: our neighborhoods are unwalkable, cars are required for almost all trips, and we end up with more accidents, air pollution, and carbon emissions. Sprawl necessitates environmental destruction as more homes gobble up more land, and suck up tax revenues as we must maintain services (roads, sewers, utilities) to these spread-out homes. For many years, I lived in the suburbs of Maryland, where local government encouraged the construction of high density housing built around public transportation hubs, both in the inner and outer suburbs. It made sense on so many economic and environmental levels. Why don't we do this near our rail centers, especially in Fairfield County? The answer our current local zoning laws.

This bill will make our suburbs more inclusive places to live and contribute to economic growth and revitalization of our cities. Modeled after successful legislation in New Jersey and informed by Raj Chetty's research on economic opportunity, this bill has the potential to generate over:

- 240,000 units of sorely needed market rate and affordable units over 10 years • 63,000 jobs (full time equivalents sustained for ten years)
- \$9.8 Billion in state and local tax revenue
- \$47 Billion in income for Connecticut residents

The segregation we live with today has a long, rather ugly history. The type of zoning we use in Connecticut has its roots in a U.S. Supreme Court case from a 1924, in which the court said that using zoning to keep people out because of their race is valid. In that case, the judge wrote the following: *"the blighting of property values and the congesting of population, whenever the colored or certain foreign races invade a residential section, are so well known as to be within the judicial cognizance."* While this judicial philosophy was long ago discarded as unjust by the Court, but its effects continue to show up in parts of Connecticut in exclusionary policies, in persistent myths about affordable housing, and in our fierce commitment to "home rule" in our segregated communities, where we prevent affordable housing from being built through town plans and zoning laws.

The Gospel challenges us to build bridges and challenge laws that hinder that by erecting walls. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells his disciples, To whom much is given,

much will be required (Luke 12:48). If you have heard that line of wisdom, you know it means we are held responsible for what we have. When we have been blessed with talents, wealth, knowledge, resources and the like, it is expected that we will use them to benefit others. Passing Fair Share will help us as a state to do that by providing much needed housing in all our communities with a solution that will provide benefits to all our people.