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**March 15, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Planning and Development Committee**

In support of

**Senate Bill 1024: An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design
Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain
Sewage Disposal Systems**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun, and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated antipoverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am here today to express our support for Senate Bill 1024, *An Act Concerning Zoning Authority, Certain Design Guidelines, Qualifications of Certain Land Use Officials and Certain Sewage Disposal Systems*.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood care and education, asset development, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

One of the most common issues that CAA customers experience is difficulty finding and maintaining appropriate, affordable housing. CAFCA supports several elements of this bill that will allow for more affordable housing in cities and towns across Connecticut, specifically the sections on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), Transit-Oriented Development, and Training for Commissioners.

(More...)

Accessory Dwelling Units

This bill enables accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, to be built across the state without burdensome restrictions. This is important to the people we serve for several reasons:

- ADUs will diversify Connecticut’s housing stock, helping to fit the needs and budgets of housing-insecure populations – especially as extended family households, single person households, and others seek various types of affordable living options, something our current stock of overwhelmingly single-family houses does not provide.
- Expanding the housing stock overall will help address increasing rents and housing costs.
- Research¹ shows that ADUs can contribute to rising property values and help low- and moderate- income homeowners generate additional income and wealth. This can be particularly important for people of color who have historically faced discriminatory housing and lending policies, therefore excluding them from homeownership in affluent and desirable neighborhoods.

Transit-Oriented Development

Many of our CAA customers do not own or have access to a car. For them, living near public transportation is paramount in being able to get to work, run basic errands, or even go to school. SB 1024 accounts for this by providing for the construction of multi-family housing near transit stations. “Up-zoning” near transit stations will help lower housing prices and increase Connecticut’s housing stock overall. Notably, it will also be attractive to younger generations of people, who are more likely to choose not to own a car, and instead to live near public transportation. We would like to thank the committee for including the affordability provisions that states that, in any development of ten units or more in transit zones, 10% of the units must be affordable. This is important in providing accessible housing for low-income people, as well as those just getting started in the workforce.

Commissioner Training

Finally, this bill requires that people who sit on land use commissions undergo training. These positions are most often political appointees, who have the desire to serve their communities, but may not have background in planning, housing policies, or other land use issues. Specifically, two of the total six hours of training are dedicated to fair and affordable housing policies, both of which are critical to the people we serve. States that have this requirement report that it is an essential component in enabling zoning commissioners to make informed decisions that affect the environment, health, and social equity of their communities.

Community Action Agencies understand the importance of addressing the housing crisis in Connecticut. As everyone continues to deal with the adverse effects of the pandemic, another crisis is on the horizon: the very real possibility that many will be evicted from their homes when the moratorium is lifted in April, or when they lose their homes in foreclosure. Supporting initiatives and funding for more affordable and diverse housing options like ADUs and transit-oriented development can help close the gap by providing another living option for the most vulnerable and at-risk residents.

In closing, I strongly urge you to support S.B. 1024. Thank you for raising this important bill and for your time and consideration.

¹ Abu-Khalaf, A. *New Reflections on Affordable Housing Design, Policy And Production: Overcoming Barriers to Bringing Accessory Dwelling Unit Development to Scale*. September 2020. Available at: <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/download?fid=14194&nid=11049>