OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

Streamlining Connecticut's Collection of Housing Data

Summary

Open Communities Alliance recommends that the state's housing reporting obligations be updated to conform to federal requirements, comply more fully with existing state obligations, and provide for better planning by:

- **Data Regulation:** Requiring the Department of Housing to create a process for assessing housing need, developing a single list of subsidized housing in the state, setting and assessing fair housing geographic investment goals, and fully reviewing grantees' affirmative marketing performance.

- **Report Progress:** Produce annually a report on affirmative marketing outcomes.

Why do we need better housing need & housing investment data?

1. **It is required by law.** The federal Fair Housing Act of 1968 and related state law require Connecticut to affirmatively further fair housing. This means Connecticut must take steps to reduce segregation, increase housing choice, and promote inclusivity.

   - **Federal duty to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing.** HUD requires recipients of housing funding to take proactive steps to counter our history of residential segregation. Without this data the state cannot set fair housing goals and measure progress in a meaningful way.

   - **State Law Already Requires Most Reporting.** Statutes such as CGS Sec. 8-37s, 8-37qqq, and 8-37bb already require such data collection, but it is not occurring in way that is transparent and most useful to the public and policymakers in trying to evaluate fair housing progress. For example, despite an obligation under CGS Sec. 8-37qqq that the Department of Housing produce a single list of the department's community development portfolio, no such list is regularly made available to the public.

2. **It is essential to good planning.** We cannot create a broader geographic range of subsidized housing choices unless we have a plan to do so and set out measurable goals to determine success. This streamlined data will provide the tools for solid fair housing regional and statewide planning.

Why do we need to streamline the process?

- **Absence of useful information.** State agencies are already subject to a web of data reporting and affirmatively furthering obligations including requirements assess housing need, affirmatively further fair housing, collect demographic data and income data from willing subsidized housing tenants, and compile lists of investments. This proposal would streamline this process by ensuring that a process is in place for collecting the most critical data.

- **No centralized list.** However, there is no centralized list of housing stock that includes property characteristics, like cost per unit and number of bedrooms, making it very difficult to do planning.

- **Incomplete tenant data.** In order to ensure that fair housing laws are being followed, DOH and CHFA are required to collect demographic data from tenants of subsidized housing willing to share it. This is not happening in a comprehensive way and there is not a transparent process for holding accountable grantees failing to engage in effective affirmative marketing.

How does the proposal help?
The proposal ensures Connecticut has the data it needs to fulfill its federal and state duties, including:

- Assessing housing need,
- Creating a single list of state and federal subsidized housing that includes important development and demographic information in a format usable by the public,
- Setting fair housing goals for housing location,
- Assessing progress on those goals annually, and
- Collecting and assessing data on grantees' affirmative marketing activities.

What does this cost?
While there may be some upfront costs, ultimately this proposal will save the state money by creating a single list that can be easily used to conform to current state reporting obligations, conduct critical planning, and comply with federal obligations.