

Testimony of Jack Dougherty in Support of S.B. 752, An Act Concerning Housing Segregation
Tuesday, February 28th, 2017

Thank you Chairs and Members of the Housing Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jack Dougherty. I am a Professor of Educational Studies at Trinity College. I am testifying today in support of S.B. 752, An Act Concerning Housing Segregation.

While racial barriers have become less overt and more subtle over time, local and state government continues to allow exclusionary housing by wealth-based zoning. Both past and present actions shape our communities today, including exclusionary zoning, racial covenants, redlining, and outright discrimination.

Beginning in the 1920s, towns have used their zoning regulations to make multifamily housing “uneconomic” to build, without expressly prohibiting it, thereby blocking most lower-income families from being able to afford to live in those communities. This takes the form of large minimum lot sizes per housing unit, limiting the number of units that may be built per acre, or requiring large road frontage and also increasing the lot size. To this day, zoning is used by many towns to restrict the possibility of developing affordable, multifamily housing

In the 1940s, racial restrictive covenants were approved by local and state governments and were written into official property deeds. Language included phrases such as:

“No persons of any race except the white race shall use or occupy any building on any lot except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race employed by an owner or tenant.”

While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial covenants were “unenforceable” in 1948, the legacy continues with us today.

In the 1930s, the process of “redlining” home mortgages similarly created concentrated poverty for people of color. Federal agencies and local lenders judged mortgage risks and downgraded neighborhoods based on race, ethnicity, and social class of residents.

In the 1940s, locally-elected leaders effectively blocked the federal government from allowing most black workers into public housing for the wartime industry in West Hartford. In the 1950s, it was widely documented that individual property owners and agents also refused to rent or sell to people of color. This transitioned into less overt manners of discrimination in recent years by way of racial steering, in which real estate agents encourage people of color to live in different neighborhoods than whites.

Government policies have played a key role in creating segregation, and so we need affirmative government policies to reverse it.