

## HB 5196: Opening Housing Choices through Expanded Housing Authority Jurisdiction

### Summary

With three critical changes, Open Communities Alliance recommends supporting this proposed amendment. The original goal of this proposal, which was a recommendation of the Fair Housing Working Group, was to give municipal housing authorities the discretion to extend their jurisdictions to thriving communities within a 30-mile radius of their town lines. This goal is completely negated by the addition of language requiring approval from the receiving municipality, an option that exists in the current law.

This requirement should be abandoned because it currently functions to limit housing choices. By allowing municipal housing authorities to function regionally, artificial barriers to housing choice will be removed, increasing access to a wider array of housing for families with disabilities, and allowing housing authorities to operate in a way that affirmatively furthers fair housing – that is, work to promote integrated housing choices.

OCA further recommends amendments to (1) include in areas to which expanded areas of operation apply moderate opportunity areas with less than 5% affordable housing as defined by CGS Sec. 8-30g and (2) the option for unlimited expanded jurisdiction for housing authorities offering a reasonable accommodations to households with disabilities.

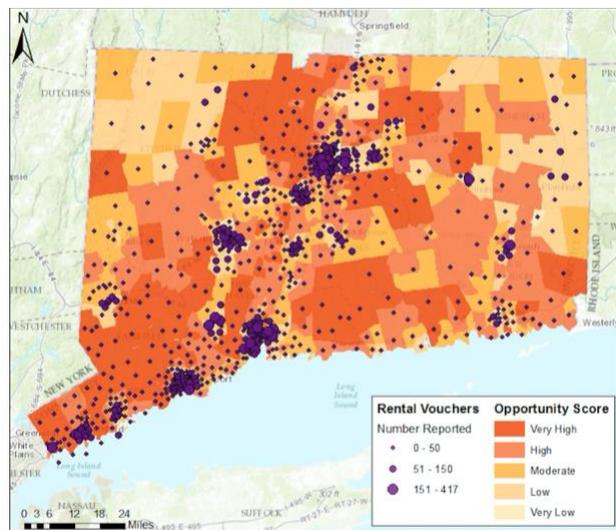
### Where can local housing authorities currently operate?

In Connecticut, housing authority jurisdiction is typically defined by town borders. This – along with incentives in federal regulations – unnecessarily restricts choices for families. For example, housing authorities have limited ability to administer the tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher program or participate in the development of certain types of physical housing units outside of their municipal jurisdiction.

### Why is limited jurisdiction a problem?

These restrictions make it difficult for housing authorities to provide their clients with true housing choice, including the option to live in “higher opportunity areas” - based on assessments of local educational outcomes, employment access, poverty, crime rates, and more.

Because most vouchers are administered by housing authorities in lower opportunity areas, housing authorities have been functionally co-opted into maintaining a system of segregation. **86% of voucher holders live outside of higher opportunity areas and 48% are concentrated in the 2% of the land area of the state assessed as very low opportunity.** Jurisdictional limits make it more difficult for housing authorities to meet their obligation under federal and state law to affirmatively further fair housing.



Opportunity map and Housing Choice Voucher locations (Dark orange areas are thriving, lightly shaded areas are struggling. 2015 mapping; 2009 HCV data.)

## How will this proposal, with OCA's amendments, give housing authorities more flexibility?

This bill proposes expanding housing authority jurisdiction under CGS Sec. 8-39 to include an "expanded area of operation." This expanded area includes "high and very high opportunity census tracts in the state of Connecticut . . . any part of which is within 30 miles of the housing authority's municipal borders." Such areas are defined in CGS Sec. 8-348.

This should be broadened to include moderate opportunity areas with less than 5% affordable housing as defined by CGS Sec. 8-30g. A map visualizing the extended areas is available at [http://www.ctoca.org/mobility\\_app](http://www.ctoca.org/mobility_app).

OCA also recommends that an additional choice for families with disabilities, who currently have trouble finding suitable housing in many jurisdictions, be added, so that housing authorities may opt to have unlimited statewide jurisdiction to honor requests for reasonable accommodations.

### The proposal maintains existing rights of municipalities by:

- Restricting certain elements of a housing authority's power – including eminent domain and the power to create a police force – in the extended jurisdiction.
- Excluding areas currently designated as "moderate opportunity" with 5% affordable housing or more in order to avoid more deeply concentrating poverty.
- In no way changing municipalities' rights to control their own zoning.

## How will this proposal affirmatively further fair housing?

The amendment is designed to remove artificial barriers to housing choice by:

- Eliminating existing disincentives for housing authorities to support broader housing searches.
- Enabling and encouraging voucher usage in a wider range of Connecticut neighborhoods.
- Empower sophisticated housing authorities to contribute their development capabilities to town efforts to generate beautiful mixed income housing.

### Expanded jurisdiction will allow housing authorities to create more access to opportunity and the resources available in thriving communities.

- Recent research has confirmed that access to community resources is vitally linked to successful life outcomes. Poverty concentration has significant negative effects on family health, education, and economic well-being, not to mention the strength of Connecticut's economy as a whole.
- Broadened housing authority jurisdiction will encourage voluntary poverty deconcentration, opening opportunities for our cities to revitalize without recreating poverty concentration elsewhere.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION SEE OCA'S WHITE PAPER, AVAILABLE AT [http://www.ctoca.org/expanded\\_housing\\_authority\\_jurisdiction](http://www.ctoca.org/expanded_housing_authority_jurisdiction).**