



# OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

## Opening Housing Choices through Expanded Housing Authority Jurisdiction

### Summary

The goal of this proposal is to give municipal housing authorities the discretion to extend their jurisdictions to thriving communities within a meaningful radius of their town borders.

### 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, due to the interplay of state and federal law, housing authorities face disincentives to encouraging tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher participants from searching for homes in other towns and cannot develop housing in their own name outside of their municipality.

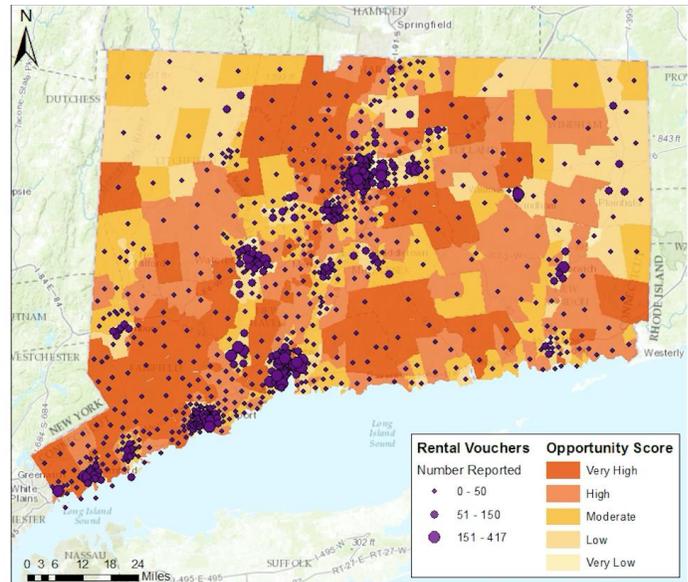
### Why is limited jurisdiction a problem?

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 almost 70% of 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.

### How will this proposal 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 15 miles of the housing authority’s municipal borders.” Such areas are defined in CGS Sec. 8-348.



### Voucher Use and Areas of Opportunity

(Dark orange areas are high-resourced and lightly shaded areas have fewer resources) OCA Opportunity Maps 2015

## 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.
- *In no way changing municipalities' rights to control their own zoning.*

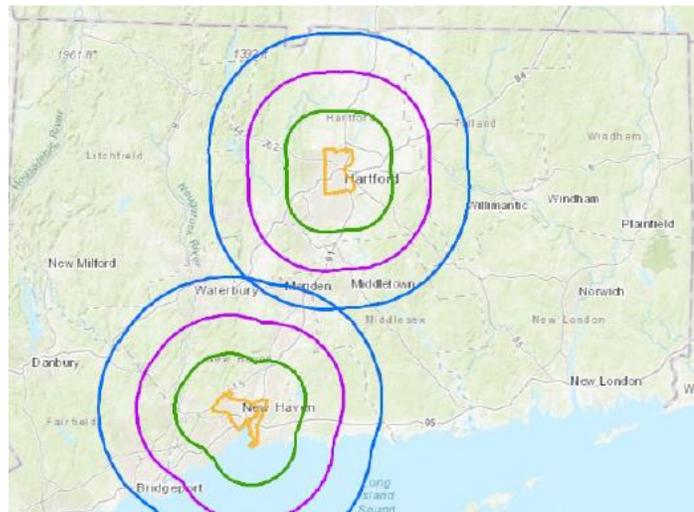
## How will this proposal affirmatively further fair housing?

This proposal is designed to remove artificial barriers to housing choice by:

- Eliminating existing disincentives for housing authorities to support housing searches in a bigger geographical area, reflecting the interests of voucher holders.
- 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.

## Why should jurisdictions extend 15 miles from municipal borders? Why not more? Why not less? Why only to high and very high opportunity areas?

- The goal of extending housing authority jurisdiction is to ensure that voucher holders have genuine access to the full range of places that reflect thriving communities in Connecticut – urban, suburban, and rural.
- Because most voucher holders currently live in our larger cities (Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport), a jurisdictional limit of less than 15 miles would be too restrictive. For example, the Hartford Housing Authority's jurisdiction would not extend to Avon or Coventry if the jurisdiction were only 5 miles.



- Elsewhere in the country, housing authorities operate on a countywide basis, meaning their jurisdiction can be extensive, as large as the entire state of Connecticut in some cases. There is no real reason that a housing authority's jurisdiction cannot be statewide, but this bill includes a 15-mile limit as a moderate proposal
- This bill extends housing authority jurisdiction limits only to high and very high opportunity areas within 15 miles of municipal borders as a way of avoiding further concentrating poverty in areas with poverty rates at or above the state average and to give voucher holders access to high resource communities.

## 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 thriving communities 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 housing choice, opening opportunities for families to access high-resource neighborhoods that otherwise would be out of the realm of possibility, this in turn will foster voluntary poverty deconcentration, setting the stage for equitable revitalization in historically disinvested areas.