



Testimony in Support of H.B. 6892 – An Act Concerning Municipal Blight Ordinances

Michelle McCabe, Executive Director
Connecticut Main Street Center

Planning and Development Committee
March 15, 2023

Dear Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, Senator Fazio, Representative Zullo, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

I write on behalf of the Connecticut Main Street Center, Inc. (CMSC), and as a member organization of the Connecticut Vibrant Communities Coalition (CVCC), in support of H.B.6892, specifically, removing the municipal population threshold for certain parties to petition the Superior Court for appointment of a receiver for a blighted and abandoned property.

The CVCC is dedicated to transforming vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties into productive community assets. CVCC is comprised of over 35 municipalities and partner organizations which address these goals through education, peer learning, leadership and policy development. CMSC joined as a member because we recognize the harmful impact of blighted and vacant properties on Connecticut's main streets, and the need for more opportunities for municipalities and communities to remedy the situation in order to ensure the vitality of their downtowns.

In 2019, the CVCC supported the passage of Public Act 19-92, An Act Concerning Abandoned and Blighted Property Receivership. This legislation makes it possible for qualified entities to petition the court to become the receiver of a vacant or abandoned property, carry out necessary rehabilitation, and return it to productive use. This legislation enables municipalities to transform problem properties into productive and tax-paying uses. The receivership statute is a critical tool in enabling communities to fight blight. We have seen successful use of this statute to revitalize neighborhoods.

However, eligibility is currently restricted to those communities with populations of 35,000 or greater. This threshold limits the ability of CVCC and CMSC member towns like Derby, Windsor Locks, and New London from accessing the receivership process. In fact, 83% of Connecticut's municipalities are excluded based on the population threshold, despite the pressing need to address blighted properties.

In addition to removing the population threshold, this bill will also increase the penalties for those property owners not acting in good faith to maintain and keep productive their parcel or building. Blighted properties have negative impact on surrounding property values, ultimately pulling down the value of our main streets overall. According to a brief published by the Urban Institute , numerous



studies have shown that vacant and blighted properties add costs to the city in terms of services used (police, fire, securing buildings, etc.), while reducing tax revenue. In Toledo, OH, it was estimated that blighted properties cost the city \$2.7M annually in lost tax revenue from surrounding properties within 500 feet of vacant buildings/lots. Increasing penalties to property owners will assist municipalities in recouping costs and deter property owners from keeping their property vacant.

We respectfully request the Committee support H.B. 6892 'An Act Concerning Municipal Blight Ordinances.' Removing the population threshold from the existing law will expand access to the receivership process as a strategy to address vacant and abandoned properties for all communities across Connecticut to generate economic development and make sure our main streets are thriving places of opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McCabe", with a long, sweeping underline.

Michelle Lapine McCabe
Executive Director