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WHERE I STAND

2 things Conn. lawmakers need to do now to address housing

By Jeff Ferony

A unifying theme is growing in the news stories about our state’s housing shortage: Connecticut needs to build more multifamily housing — now. And in a state with aging housing stock, the answer can be explained with arithmetic: expansion + renovation = more housing.

Having been engaged in the legislative process for the past few years, I am encouraged to hear more voices from business and nonprofit groups harmonizing on the call to grow housing for people of all ages and incomes across our state — from empty nesters and downsized retirees to young families and students.



J Studios/Getty Images

To succeed, two things need to happen before the legislature’s closing day June 4. First, Connecticut has to show it *wants* to grow housing by passing creative, pro-growth solutions to expand housing — such as Senate Bill (SB) 1263. This is an inventive bill that offers a real opportunity to breathe new life into underused properties by streamlining the conversion of commercial buildings into multifamily housing, particularly near utilities and transit infrastructure, where demand is highest. With fewer than two months left in the session, this is where lawmakers need to focus.

Legislators also need to reject proposals such as House Bill 6889, which would override leases and undermine the safety of Connecticut’s apartment communities. Some have falsely nicknamed it the “just cause” bill, but there is no more cause for this bill today than when the legislature rejected it last year. It does not protect Connecticut’s apartment communities.

The risks of removing lease nonrenewals are not theoretical. Several years ago, at an apartment community I managed in Waterbury, we faced a situation where a tenant began running a drug operation from their unit. Despite clear signs of illegal activity, we were unable to evict the tenant for cause due to the constraints of the law. The burden of proof in such cases is overwhelming, especially when the primary evidence often comes from tenant testimony. Fearful of retaliation, other residents were unwilling to testify, making it impossible to meet the legal standards for eviction. As a result, the environment became unsafe — late-night activity and an influx of strangers led some residents to move out.

The only available solution was to choose not to renew the tenant’s lease when it ended. Once that happened and they refused to vacate, we were able to begin the legal process to regain possession of the unit. This was a lengthy and challenging process, but it was the only option to restore safety to the community. House Bill (HB) 6889 would essentially end most of these lapse-of-time situations, which its proponents describe as “no-cause” evictions. By eliminating lapse-of-time lease nonrenewals, HB 6889 would remove one of the few remaining tools property managers have to ensure community safety when formal eviction isn’t feasible — potentially trapping neighbors in unsafe or deteriorating conditions.

Nobody wants to be in an eviction situation — yet there are times when a landlord needs to send a nonrenewal notice. Furthermore, residents should be able to report poor conditions at their apartments without the fear of retaliation — which is illegal under state and federal law — and landlords should respond rapidly to remedy the situation. There should also be no such thing as an unreachable, absentee landlord — whether that landlord lives in the buildings they provide or out of state.

Connecticut law already requires a housing provider to provide 60 days’ notice of non-renewal, and if a resident chooses to challenge that, they have up to an additional 6 months of protection on a month-to-month lease.

Last year, lawmakers rejected this proposal. I believe this was because they realized it would not protect Connecticut’s apartment communities and not add a single new apartment home in our state. Not one.

My fellow Connecticut Apartment Association members and I are talking with legislators from both parties to pass bills to boost housing development, protect the rights of residents and housing providers and stand up against unethical practices and develop ways to assist reporting and enforcement to promote safe and ethically sound housing. By working together we can help individuals and families find — and stay in — quality, affordable rental living that works for every budget.

Let’s focus on what matters — more housing, safer communities and practical, fair solutions for all.

Jeff Ferony is president at Trio Properties and a member of the Connecticut Apartment Association.



SUSAN CAMPBELL
COMMENTARY

The Trump administration has been floating ideas that are meant to increase the country’s birthrate, but I have better ones.

Their timing is a little ironic, because while the administration was gutting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s IVF team, Trump was calling himself “the fertilization president.”

Ignore that disturbing visual image, and let’s move on.

For all kinds of reasons, the fertility rate in the United States has been dropping pretty much since 1957, when there were almost 123 births per 1,000 women between ages 15 and 44. From the National Vital Statistics System, 2024’s fertility rate had sunk to nearly 55 births among women in that age group. (Here is where the administration could be lighting a candle to Elon Musk, who just left D.C. to spend time with his tanking exploding car company. Musk, the father of 14 or so children with four — or five — women, has been doing more than his share to build Trump’s baby army.)

One solutions the administration is kicking around is a \$5,000 baby bonus to (married) mothers, and if that gives off distinct authoritarian, white supremacist/replacement theory vibes, it should. Such a bonus is not fiscally smart. In fact, it’s stupid. Investopedia says it costs roughly \$311,000 to raise a child to age 17 — that’s just to get a child to high school graduation, never mind college. And that figure is probably low because it’s from 2022, the latest year for which such data is available.

In Connecticut, Trump’s baby bonus wouldn’t get you through three months’ of child care, never mind diapers.

Trump can’t buy a baby boom for \$5K



Maria Dobrica/500px/Getty Images/500px

A similar bonus offered in other countries (such as Russia) did not affect that country’s birthrate. Of late, Taiwan’s government has spent billions to socially engineer large families. A recent presidential candidate even proposed offering pets for pregnancies.

Neither candidate nor his pet proposal stayed long in the spotlight.

Another Trump proposal is to sponsor classes about lady bits — the better, I assume, to train child-bearers to effectively implement what used to be called the rhythm method, or “natural family planning” once birth control is completely taken off the table for all but the most well-heeled. NFP is effective between 77-98% of the time, so your results may vary. If that sounds familiar, Germany’s League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel) also sought to prepare girls for their inevitable role as Nazi wives and Nazi mothers.

Wait, wait! Here’s another idea! Medals! Our federal government has mused that women would have more babies if that earned them a medal. And once again, we find provenance with Hitler’s Mother’s Crosses. Eight or more children got you a gold one. Maybe Musk can collect his soon.

Or, rather than waste time dipping into Nazi ideas, we could look at real solutions, right after we acknowledge that

some people choose not to procreate. That is their right and no amount of quick-fix proposals will (or should) change that. And some people will choose smaller families. That, too, is their right.

For people who might one day choose parenthood, here are some ideas divorced from Nazi ideology:

- Provide better and more affordable child care. According to the United Way of Connecticut, the average cost of full-time infant care at a center in the state is \$355 — but costs can range up to \$708. The average cost for full-time infant care in a home isn’t that much cheaper — \$278. We are among the most expensive states for child care, according to Visual Capitalist. Child care is considered affordable if it costs no more than 7% of a family’s income. According to the Economic Policy Institute, every family earning their area’s median income pays a bigger percentage than that.

- Take climate change seriously. New research shows that uncertainty about the planet’s future absolutely plays into people’s decisions to procreate.

- Think about different ways to approach higher education. The cost of college is unbearable for many families, while the cost of going to college is a bill they’ll pay the rest of their lives, in potential earnings, ac-

cording to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- Address our affordable housing crisis as if it really a crisis. Because we don’t have not enough affordable housing stock, people are being pushed into homelessness in Connecticut at record rates.

- Provide equal pay for equal work. We marked Equal Pay Day last month, when women who worked the entire year before also worked until March 25 to earn the same amount as men working the same jobs.

Granted, these solutions require more than an executive order, a check, or a medal. And since I operate under no delusion that Trump’s administration pays attention to real-world solutions, the best advice I can give is that if the administration implements proven-not-to-work protocols such as baby bonuses, young families should cash those checks immediately. This is not a group known for paying its bills.

Susan Campbell is the author of “Frog Hollow: Stories from an American Neighborhood,” “Tempest-Tossed: The Spirit of Isabella Beecher Hooker” and “Dating Jesus: A Story of Fundamentalism, Feminism and the American Girl.” She is Distinguished Lecturer at the University of New Haven, where she teaches journalism. slcampbell417@gmail.com