

March 2, 2026

Esteemed Chairs Felipe and Marx,
Members of the Housing Committee:

On behalf of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG), I am pleased to offer comments on Raised Bill 339, *An Act Allowing Long-Term Rental of Bedrooms in a Single-Family Home as of Right*. The bill would amend CGS §8-2(d) to prohibit municipalities from (1) prohibiting the long-term rental (six months or more) of up to three bedrooms in an owner-occupied single-family home, and (2) requiring a special permit or special exception for such rentals. Importantly, the bill applies only to long-term rentals of six months or more. It does not require municipalities to provide for short-term or transient lodging.

WestCOG approaches state involvement in local land use regulation with deliberation and respect for Connecticut's long-standing tradition of municipal zoning authority. Municipal governments properly regulate the physical development of land—its form, its intensity, its infrastructure demands, and its external impacts on surrounding properties. They are best positioned to evaluate roads, parking, water and wastewater septic systems, drainage, and neighborhood-scale effects.

Raised Bill 339 does not alter those traditional land use dimensions. It does not change where a home may be built, how large it may be, how many dwelling units are permitted, or how many occupants a structure may safely accommodate under applicable health and safety codes. It does not modify setbacks, lot coverage, dimensional standards, or infrastructure capacity rules. Rather, the bill addresses a different and more limited question: whether zoning regulations may prohibit or require discretionary approval for the long-term rental of bedrooms within an owner-occupied home that is already permitted for residential use.

In that respect, the measure is not fundamentally about land use. The land remains residential. The structure remains unchanged. The intensity of occupancy remains governed by existing state codes and local standards. The bill addresses the permissibility of long-term bedroom rentals within an owner-occupied dwelling that is already authorized for residential occupancy. Zoning continues to regulate external impacts and infrastructure capacity; this proposal does not alter those functions. Rather, it clarifies that the residential use of property does not turn on whether the lawful adult occupants of a home are related by blood, marriage, or contract, or whether an owner chooses to share space within a residence that is already permitted and safely occupied.

I. LATENT RESIDENTIAL CAPACITY

Public discussion of housing often centers on “shortages,” but it is important to distinguish between shortages of housing units and shortages of housing space. Over the past fifty years, the size of new homes in the United States has increased dramatically—70 to 75% in square footage—while household size has declined by roughly one person. Connecticut reflects this pattern, building larger homes for smaller households. The result is a structural surplus of interior residential space. Even conservative assumptions suggest that Connecticut contains hundreds of

thousands of vacant bedrooms embedded within the existing housing stock. That represents a large shadow inventory of housing capacity that already is fully constructed, fully serviced, and fully integrated into neighborhoods. Bill 339 recognizes that reality and allows homeowners, on a voluntary basis, to share the space that already exists in their homes.

II. ALIGNING HOUSING POLICY WITH DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY

Much of Connecticut's housing stock was built during a period when the dominant household model consisted of two parents and multiple children. Today, approximately two-thirds of Connecticut households consist of just one or two persons. This demographic transformation has created a structural mismatch between the design of homes and the composition of households. Many homeowners, particularly empty nesters, widows and widowers, and long-time residents, occupy homes with unused bedroom capacity. This bill acknowledges that reality. It permits homeowners to adapt to contemporary living patterns without altering their home's footprint, subdivision pattern, or external appearance.

III. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE HOUSING STRATEGIES AVAILABLE

Bedroom rentals represent a uniquely efficient form of housing supply:

- The space is already built.
- The infrastructure is already in place.
- The environmental footprint already exists.
- No permitting backlog is created.
- No public capital investment is required.

Because this bill activates existing interior space rather than encouraging new land consumption or outward expansion, it is inherently consistent with environmental stewardship and smart growth principles. It reduces pressure for greenfield development and allows communities to make more efficient use of their existing housing stock.

IV. NATURALLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHOUT SUBSIDY

Beyond efficiency, bedroom rentals provide something increasingly rare in the housing market: naturally occurring affordability. A rented bedroom will, by definition, cost less than a standalone apartment, condominium, or detached dwelling unit. Nor does it carry the land costs, construction costs, financing costs, and regulatory costs associated with new development. As a result, it can provide an accessible entry point into stable housing for individuals who cannot afford—or may not want—a standalone unit.

This form of housing does not depend on tax credits, public subsidy, or regulatory mandates. It emerges organically from the existing housing stock. Even if only a modest percentage of homeowners choose to participate, the scale of the underlying capacity means the aggregate impact could be meaningful, particularly for individuals seeking transitional, early-career, or shared housing arrangements. In an era when housing affordability challenges are acute across income levels, policies that unlock lower-cost living options within existing homes can complement, rather than replace, broader supply strategies.

For many homeowners, modest rental income can also offset rising property taxes, utilities, and maintenance costs, strengthening housing stability on both sides of the arrangement.

V. EXPANDING HOUSING OPTIONS FOR DIVERSE HOUSEHOLD TYPES

Bill 339 is permissive, not mandatory. No homeowner is required to rent space. No neighborhood is required to change its physical character. Instead, the bill simply enables voluntary, long-term shared housing arrangements. The households who may benefit include:

- Seniors seeking companionship, added income, or informal caregiving support
- Widows and widowers looking to reduce isolation
- Homeowners seeking to age in place while stabilizing their finances
- Single adults restructuring their lives after divorce
- Young professionals and early-career workers entering the housing market
- New migrants or individuals in transition who may not desire, or be able to afford, a standalone unit
- Individuals seeking stable, long-term shared living arrangements with friends or extended social networks

This approach reflects the reality that modern households are diverse and evolving. It supports intergenerational living, social resilience, and economic flexibility without the cost, delays, or potential impacts of new construction.

VI. OWNER-OCCUPANCY PROVIDES BUILT-IN ACCOUNTABILITY AND STABILITY

It is critical to emphasize that this bill applies only to owner-occupied single-family homes, and only to long-term rentals of six months or more. That limitation is significant. Because the owner must reside in the home:

- The property owner has a direct financial incentive to maintain the property.
- The owner has a direct interest in preserving neighborhood quality.
- The owner remains subject to—and motivated to comply with—local regulations.
- The arrangement is inherently more stable than absentee-investor scenarios.

This is not a proposal to create absentee-operated rooming houses, short-term lodging, or high-turnover “party houses.” Owners living on site have every incentive to protect their property value, maintain order, and comply with local standards. The presence of an owner-occupant is a powerful stabilizing factor.

VII. NO EROSION OF EXISTING MUNICIPAL ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY

It is equally important to clarify what this bill does not do. Nothing in Bill 339 prevents municipalities from enforcing:

- Existing zoning regulations that apply generally to single-family homes
- Nuisance ordinances
- Noise regulations
- Parking regulations
- Property maintenance standards
- Health and safety codes

Municipalities retain full authority to address disruptive conduct, overcrowding inconsistent with code, unsafe conditions, and violations of generally applicable regulations.

The bill simply prevents a municipality from categorically prohibiting the long-term rental of up to three bedrooms in an owner-occupied home or requiring a discretionary permit for that activity. It does not strip municipalities of their police power or enforcement tools.

VIII. MINIMAL IMPACT ON NEIGHBORHOOD FORM AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

One of the principal concerns with state-level zoning interventions is the potential loss of municipal authority to shape the physical form of their communities. Bill 339 does not implicate that concern. It does not alter:

- Setbacks
- Height limits
- Lot coverage
- Building bulk
- Density standards
- Architectural controls
- Streetscape patterns

No new structures are required. No exterior changes are mandated. The visual and physical character of neighborhoods remains intact. If the General Assembly seeks reforms that expand housing opportunity while preserving community form, this is among the least intrusive approaches available.

IX. NOT ABOUT INCREASING OCCUPANCY BEYOND ESTABLISHED SAFETY FRAMEWORKS

WestCOG wishes to be explicit that this bill should not be understood as increasing occupancy beyond what homes were designed, permitted, and regulated to accommodate under existing building, fire, and housing codes. The bill concerns the legality of renting bedrooms, not the expansion of structural capacity. It does not override life-safety standards, septic regulations, well capacity rules, or applicable occupancy limits embedded in existing codes.

In other words:

- It allows lawful long-term room rentals.
- It does not expand the safety envelope of a structure.
- It does not authorize overcrowding beyond established standards.

The legislative record should make clear that the bill operates within the existing framework of health and safety protections.

X. REDUCING AMBIGUITY AND MODERNIZING OUTDATED ASSUMPTIONS

In many communities across Connecticut, long-term roommate arrangements already occur. Often they do so quietly and without incident. However, unclear or inconsistent regulatory treatment can lead to ambiguity and complaint-driven enforcement. By establishing a clear

statewide baseline for owner-occupied long-term bedroom rentals, the bill reduces uncertainty, promotes fairness, and aligns zoning practice with modern living patterns.

Moreover, courts have increasingly scrutinized zoning frameworks that rely on rigid definitions of “family” disconnected from contemporary living patterns. Bill 339 does not attempt to redefine family, but it does recognize the reality that household composition has evolved. In doing so, it reduces potential legal tension while modernizing the framework in a restrained and practical manner.

XI. CONCLUSION

WestCOG remains mindful of the importance of municipal land use authority and does not support indiscriminate statewide overrides of local zoning. However, Bill 339 represents a focused, pragmatic reform that:

- Activates existing housing capacity rather than mandating new construction
- Preserves neighborhood physical form and architectural character
- Imposes no infrastructure burden
- Requires no public subsidy
- Operates within existing health and safety frameworks
- Maintains municipal enforcement authority over nuisance, noise, parking, and general zoning compliance
- Reflects demographic reality and modern household composition
- Provides naturally affordable housing options in a voluntary manner
- Ensures that arrangements remain stable and accountable through owner-occupancy
- Aligns with environmental stewardship and smart growth principles by reducing pressure for outward expansion

For these reasons, WestCOG respectfully supports Bill 339. Should you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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