



TESTIMONY

Testimony on S1408 Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee March 17, 2025

16 W. Lafayette St.
Trenton, NJ 08608
p: (609) 393-0008
f: (609) 360-8478
w: njfuture.org

Contact: Helen Kioukis, Policy Manager
hkioukis@njfuture.org; 609-250-2941

Chair Singleton, Vice Chair Stack, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S1408. My name is Helen Kioukis, and I am the Policy Manager at New Jersey Future, a nonpartisan organization that promotes smart growth and strong communities. New Jersey Future recently launched the Great Homes and Neighborhoods for All initiative, an abundant housing initiative to ensure that New Jersey residents of all ages and stages of life have good choices for a home in a safe, affordable neighborhood. We are seeking state-level reforms to increase housing production and allow for more compact, inclusive, mixed-income homes in climate-safe, green, walkable areas.

While we are excited to see a new version of S1408 posted in committee, we have not had the opportunity to review it prior to today's committee meeting in order to provide more detailed recommendations. Nevertheless, New Jersey Future strongly supports the purpose of the bill: to encourage the conversion of empty or underutilized commercial properties to mixed-use areas with affordable housing. Allowing for the repurposing of these sites is one more strategy needed in New Jersey to chip away at our housing shortage—a shortage that is more acute now than it was in 2017 when the first iteration of this bill was introduced. We have an affordable housing deficit that exceeds 200,000, and nearly 340,000 renter households are considered “severely cost-burdened,” meaning these households spend more than 50% of their income on housing costs.[1]

This is a massive statewide problem that requires a statewide solution, and we cannot rely on a patchwork of 564 local policies to address these supply and affordability issues.

We encourage you to adopt additional amendments that were incorporated into the Assembly version of this bill, A2757, in the last legislative session, along with language that incorporates good planning principles to ensure that these mixed-use districts are indeed walkable, vibrant, and desirable places, and that new neighborhoods are great places to live. For example, A2757 expanded the definition of “eligible property” in order to ensure that commercial properties being redeveloped for mixed-use are within planning areas designated for growth, but away from areas that can cause health hazards.

Additional language should add guardrails to ensure that new homes are not built in areas susceptible to flooding. And since many of these underutilized commercial areas that we call “stranded assets” were initially designed to be inaccessible—located far from municipal centers and reachable only by car—additional planning requirements can help ensure neighbors and school-aged children can reach other neighborhoods and destinations, like schools, by walking and biking.

Everyone in New Jersey deserves an affordable place to live in a safe, vibrant community. S1408 is an important tool that can bring us closer to achieving meaningful change in our state by increasing housing production, addressing affordability, and revitalizing underutilized and distressed areas. We look forward to working with you to refine this bill so it delivers on that promise. Thank you, again, for this opportunity.

[1] National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2025 New Jersey Housing Profile, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/SHP_NJ.pdf.