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Letter from the Lexington Association for Moderate Cost Housing to the State Senate's Urban Affairs Committee in support of H. 2924, 3/19/1969

Bonnie Jones

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Senator John J. Moakley
State House
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Senator Moakley:

Enclosed is the testimony given by Mrs. Lindman at the public hearing today in favor of H. 2924. We hope the situation in Lexington will illustrate the difficulties faced by those interested in providing housing for low and moderate income families in the suburbs.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) James L. Jones
To: Urban Affairs Committee  
From: Mrs Jack Christensen, Mrs. James L. Jones, Mrs. Morris Lindman, Mrs. Caesar Briefer, Mrs. Joseph Cochin (members of the Lexington Association for Moderate Cost Housing)  

Re: Testimony in favor of H. 2924 - to exempt low and moderate income housing from local zoning laws  

We would like to record ourselves in favor of H. 2924 primarily because zoning seems to be a major stumbling block to moderate or low income housing in many suburbs. Some time in the next two weeks the Lexington Town Meeting will decide whether to change the zoning of a 13.6 acre parcel of land from single family to multi family use for the purpose of building 115 units of moderate income 221(d)3 housing. A two thirds vote is necessary and most observers believe a favorable vote is very unlikely.

The Lexington Commission on Suburban Responsibility (an official body appointed by the Selectmen) and other citizen groups favor this housing but resistance in the community seems to be strong. This resistance seems to be based on: opposition to any apartments; fear of overcrowding the schools; fear of an influx of city dwellers (particularly black families); a lack of assurance that the builder will receive Federal financing (reasonable because land must be properly zoned before builder can apply for federal financing); desire to try some other method such as scattered site development on single lots or use of existing housing.

Given the economic difficulties of obtaining land for moderate income housing and finding developers willing to build it, and given the desperate need for housing in the metropolitan community we don't believe it desirable to wait for suburban towns to find the ideal spot in their town and the ideal plan Before they will act. Towns like Lexington have very few options; there is not much old housing which is not also very expensive and it is economically unfeasible to build single family units in the moderate income range given existing zoning restrictions and costs of land and construction. Even if subsidizing families in existing rental housing were made possible in Lexington (State rental assistance) this would not add to the housing supply.

Lexington is a relatively liberal community and many of the town meeting members, possibly a majority, favor moderate income housing. Also the Lexington Council of Churches is in the process of forming a non-profit corporation which could initiate moderate income housing programs. However, with a two-thirds vote of the Town Meeting necessary for a zoning change it may take many years for this community to face its responsibility of supplying a wider choice of housing both to its own residents and to those outside the community. We fear that it is unreasonable to expect to meet the housing crisis by waiting for a change of attitude in suburbia, a change which may never come.