

Xiomara Albán DeLobato's testimony makes a compelling case of school-centered neighborhood development

On October 9, 2025, Gateway City leaders testified in support of [An Act to Promote School-Centered Neighborhood Development](#). Xiomara Albán DeLobato, Vice President of the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, made a particularly compelling case for why this legislation matters to Gateway Cities in her region. We have republished her remarks below. A full recording of the testimony can be found [here](#).



Chairman Gomez and Vargas, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you, for your leadership and ongoing commitment to Massachusetts.

My name is Xiomara Albán DeLobato, and I serve as Vice President and Chief of Staff, of the Western Mass Economic Development Council, where we focus on driving inclusive growth, supporting innovation, and strengthening communities across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties.

Our Council strongly supports the School-Centered Neighborhood Development legislation because it reflects a truth we see on the ground every day: schools are not just educational institutions; they are economic and civic anchors. When we invest in schools as community hubs, we catalyze broader neighborhood revitalization.

We have been closely working with Ben Forman at MassINC to continue supporting this effort because this approach –aligning education reform, community development, and public-private partnerships– isn't theory. It works. Models like *Purpose Built Communities in Atlanta* and the *National Community Schools* movement have shown that when you

combine academic excellence with safe housing, small-business development, and workforce pathways, you reverse cycles of disinvestment. You create neighborhoods where families want to stay, businesses want to grow, and students can see a future for themselves right where they live.

In Western Massachusetts, we have the building blocks –historic schools, walkable neighborhoods, and strong anchor institutions. What we've lacked is the connective tissue: the policy framework that intentionally links education, housing, and economic mobility. School-Centered Neighborhood Development does exactly that.

By advancing this legislation, you're not just improving schools, you're building ecosystems of opportunity. You're giving local leaders the flexibility to innovate and the partnerships to deliver measurable results: higher graduation rates, reduced absenteeism, safer streets, stronger small-business corridors, and equitable growth that reaches every zip code.

Chair Gomez, thank you again for championing policies that recognize the power of place and people in Western mass and throughout the commonwealth. The Western Mass EDC, and our co-partners on this initiative, MLK Community Center, and American International College stand ready to collaborate to ensure that every school can serve as a center of gravity for community renewal.