



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
House Bill 5267, An Act Concerning the Department of Economic and Community
Development's Strategic Planning Regarding the Promotion of Arts and Culture
Commerce Committee
March 1, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Hartley, Representative Currey, Senator Martin, Representative Buckbee and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to testify **in support of House Bill 5267, An Act Concerning the Department of Economic and Community Development's Strategic Planning Regarding the Promotion of Arts and Culture.**

As part of the Hartford Foundation's efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports arts and culture in our region, with a focus on people of color, who are underrepresented in Greater Hartford's art workforce. The Foundation's efforts are focused on increasing the arts sector's stability and resilience and increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of Greater Hartford's arts workforce.

The arts are a critical asset in our region and, when properly utilized, can support community and resident well-being, including physical and mental health, learning, economic growth and community cohesion and resilience. The arts provided an invaluable source of hope and healing over the past two years. Yet, in times of crisis, many funders and the state must prioritize Basic Human Needs and the nonprofits that provide them. As we move from crisis to recovery and ongoing resilience, we should consider public support for the arts as part of that recovery plan.

Our Arts and Culture grantmaking and other activities are informed by [the 2019 Greater Hartford Arts Landscape Study](#), commissioned by the Hartford Foundation and the Connecticut Office of the Arts. The study found a vibrant sector challenged by financial fragility and a need to address issues of equity, diversity and inclusion related to access, program content, workforce and leadership.

Our research and evaluation of the Greater Hartford arts sector tells us that people of color are underrepresented in Greater Hartford's art workforce, particularly Latinx artists and organizations. Artists and creatives are among the workers most severely affected by the pandemic. Black and Indigenous artists have higher rates of unemployment than white artists due to COVID and have lost a larger portion of their 2020 income. Pre-COVID, one-third of Greater Hartford's arts organizations exhibited signs of financial fragility.

In May 2020, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving announced the formation of an advisory group to lift up and influence resource allocation for artists of color in the region. The Foundation's *Artists of Color Unite!* (AOCU) advisory group closed out 2020 by recommending three grants totaling \$400,000 to support arts projects, capacity building and COVID-19 relief.

In 2021, this same advisory group recommended a \$200,000 grant to support Artists of Color Accelerate, a fellowship program that connects ten artists with ten organizations that will host them to develop



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artistic ventures of community significance while our community recovers from Covid. The program empowers fellows and the greater Hartford local arts community to be cultural ambassadors whose work contributes to the elevation of Hartford as a distinct arts and culture center despite systemic barriers.

The advisory group also recommended \$370,500 to support the Independent Arts Fund regranting program that funded 36 art projects in visual arts, theater, podcasts, dance, video, fashion, music, publishing, etc. further supporting artistic communities of color in Hartford.

While philanthropic dollars are more flexible, we have seen how COVID has created the competing needs between vital, basic human services and the arts sector. This reinforces the need for the public sector to be the first and primary funder for both arts and basic human needs. Private funder partnerships can be positioned to bring in additional dollars from the federal and national funders.

The Foundation offers its support for House Bill 5267 that would require the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to include the arts and culture industries in the department's strategic state-wide marketing plan. This would provide vital support for promoting the broad array of arts and cultural attractions throughout the state at a time when our arts organizations are struggling to continue. Providing marketing support for arts and culture will provide some much-needed stability to these sectors, which have seen state support decline over the past decade. We would encourage the Department of Economic and Community Development to work to ensure that marketing and promotional support is provided under resourced artists of color.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and the business sector to support arts and culture in our state and create a stronger infrastructure to ensure the arts sector's stability and resilience and increase the racial/ethnic diversity of Connecticut's arts workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.