



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on

Senate Bill 1361, An Act Establishing a Housing Growth Fund for a Municipal Grant

Senate Bill 1365, An Act Establishing a Grant Program to Create Affordable Housing Developments With Certain Deed Restrictions

Senate Bill 1362, An Act Establishing a Construction Employment and Affordable Housing Pilot Program

Senate Bill 1363, An Act Establishing a Pilot Program for Certain Mortgage Borrowers with Student Loan Debt

House Bill 7030, AN Act Expanding the Open Choice Voucher Pilot Program

House Bill 7033, An Act Prohibiting a Municipality from Imposing Any Penalty on Homeless Persons for Performing Life-Sustaining Activities on Public Land

Housing Committee

February 27, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Marx, Representative Felipe, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. **The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bills 1361, 1365, 1362, 1363, and House Bill 7030 and 7033. These bills reflect a commitment among many legislators to address the urgent need to increase housing opportunities, especially for low- and moderate-income residents, to create job training opportunities, support people with student loan debt, and to protect people experiencing homelessness from unfair penalties.**

Since 1925, the Hartford Foundation has proudly served as the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. This year, the foundation celebrates 100 years of service and remains committed to building an even greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, we have distributed more than \$100 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the foundation has awarded grants of more than \$1 billion since its founding.

The foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods. **This work includes supporting efforts to increase the number of [thriving Greater Hartford neighborhoods](#), with a focus on Black and Latine residents' quality of life, working with nonprofit, government, and other community partners.** Strategic outcomes include increasing number of people living in stable housing, increasing preservation and new development of community assets as well as social connectedness in Hartford neighborhoods, and increasing the number of stable, resident owned small



businesses. Thriving neighborhood that often offer employment opportunities, better performing schools, lower crime and availability of quality, affordable housing. These are qualities many of us look for in choosing a place to live.

Given these interrelated issues, we urge legislators to support immediate interventions as well as to examine systemic challenges that are driving housing instability in Connecticut.

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide [HOMEConnecticut Campaign](#). Its mission is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has equitable access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in a community of their choice. The partners of HOMEConnecticut recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve.

According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing 2023 Index](#), rising housing costs have exacerbated poverty: About a third of households are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Forty-nine percent of renters are burdened by housing costs, with higher shares among Black (55 percent) and Latino (54 percent) renters.

[Statewide, rents have increased by 24 percent since 2017](#). More than 120,000 renter households spend [more than half of their income](#) on housing costs, well beyond the affordable target for housing costs of 30 percent of household income. After receiving a Section 8 housing voucher, many families then struggle to find an affordable housing in the location they want.

We know that Connecticut currently has a gap of more than 92,000 affordable homes, with a significant need among households earning below 30 percent of the Area Medium Income (AMI). It is estimated that there are only 34 homes for every 100 households at this lower AMI, leaving more than 70 percent with an affordable place to live.

The foundation supports Senate Bill 1361 which establishes a Housing Growth Fund to be administered by the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to provide grants to municipalities for affordable housing initiatives. By providing a \$50 million annual allocation, the Housing Growth Fund can create incentives for municipalities to increase affordable housing availability, promote housing production for low and moderate-income families, and maximize residential, commercial, and leisure space near transit facilities. The foundation also appreciates that the legislation provides for an annual report beginning in January 2027 to provide detail about the grant applications received, grants awarded, and specifics about what municipalities received support and for what projects.

Th foundation also supports Senate Bill 1365 which creates a new grant program administered by the Department of Housing to create affordable housing developments, and to develop specific grant requirements and implementation guidelines. Currently there are approximately 34 homes available for 100 households earning below 30 percent of Area Median Income, leaving 70 percent without an affordable home. This proposal would provide grants to applicants who commit to creating housing developments where 60 percent of the units are deed-restricted for individuals or families earning no more than \$35,000. The foundation credits the bill's authors for encouraging the Commissioner of



Housing to develop this program consulting and coordinating with municipalities, housing authorities, and other state and quasi-public agencies. A collaborative effort is vital to creating an initiative that will be embraced by stakeholders. The foundation also appreciates that this proposal also includes a requirement that an annual report be submitted to the Housing Committee detailing the number of grant applications received, grants awarded, grant recipients, and grant amounts.

As part of our strategic work to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to increase stable [employment opportunities](#) for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment.

This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a sustaining wage. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing opportunities for education and training along with hiring and retaining residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

The foundation also offers its support for House Bill 7030 which expands the duration of Connecticut's existing Open Choice Voucher pilot program to run through the 2027 school year. This modest program provides twenty rental assistance certificates over two years to eligible families with children participating in the interdistrict public school program who wish to move to their child's school district. This proposal also develops procedures for landlord and family recruitment, search assistance, and mobility counseling. We know that many of the families participating in this program have limited incomes and transportation to and from school can often be challenging. Providing families with the ability to move to the town where their child goes to school can respond to this challenge and also help the family develop closer relationships with school staff and members of the community.

For many years, the foundation has supported workforce education and training programs, many of which have been administered by [Capital Workforce Partners \(CWP\)](#). This includes the [Jobs Funnel for Construction](#), a pre-employment preparation and job training program for individuals seeking employment in construction and construction-related trades. CWP also directs the [BEST \(Basic Education Skills Training\) Chance](#) job program which provides job training, career counseling, and retention services for justice involved persons and those returning from incarceration. This program provides free training in a variety of fields, including construction and carpentry, to returning citizens and justice-system involved youth ages 18-24..

The foundation supports Senate Bill 1362 which establishes a one-year pilot program through the Department of Housing to create employment opportunities in the construction industry as part of developing affordable housing. The bill's dual intent of expanding employment in construction where there are jobs while increasing affordable housing is powerful and has great potential. We recommend considering whether the pilot is long enough to develop plans and test the model. We support the requirements that projects demonstrate a plan for creating construction jobs and developing housing. The foundation also appreciates that this proposal requires that all housing built under the program must remain permanently affordable through restrictive covenants or other mechanisms determined by the Commissioner of Housing. While the foundation cannot speak to the specifics of the funding



mechanism, we appreciate that part of this funding proposal includes that project sponsors have a project labor agreement that commits to workforce training using state-registered apprenticeship standards.

Recognizing the value of postsecondary education and training to the economic mobility of middle- and low-income students, in 2024 the foundation awarded 440 scholarships totaling more than \$1.45 million. These scholarships were awarded through more than 100 funds created at the Hartford Foundation by individuals, families, and organizations. Since 1945, the foundation has been awarding scholarships and has seen first-hand the importance of students receiving adequate funds to attend college. For many students, especially those from low- and moderate-income families, whether they receive the financial aid needed directly affects the feasibility of attending four-year colleges. We know that a high percentage of older and first-generation students in Connecticut rely on receiving substantial support.

The foundation has seen how the rising costs of a college education and student loan debt have severely limited the ability of college graduates to achieve major milestones including starting a family, starting a business, and buying their first home. **The foundation supports Senate Bill 1363 which creates a pilot program through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) designed to help qualifying mortgage borrowers with student loan debt by offering a 1.125 percentage point reduction in their mortgage interest rate.** This modest decrease in the mortgage interest rate for first-time homebuyers with incomes at or below 100 percent of area median income and student loan debt of at least \$15,000 is a thoughtful approach to assist Connecticut college graduates seeking to purchase their first home.

As part of our strategic priorities to dismantle structural racism and advance equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latine communities, the Hartford Foundation also supports [basic human needs](#) in our region applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address access to housing, food, physical and emotional well-being. Many of the foundation's past and current grants focus on preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford. The Hartford foundation has supported the work of housing providers for many years. We know that programs with public-private funding are better able to address the layers of need and sustain the work. **Adequate public support is essential** if we are to address the interrelated needs that data show are prevalent in communities of color, youth, and adult reentry populations. No single entity can meet the enormous need alone. It requires strong partnerships.

Each year, the Foundation awards approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, warming centers, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and other services to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In 2021, the foundation began more fully supporting the mission of homelessness and other service providers by offering multiyear core support, as well as project grants, including two modest annual grants to proximate organizations providing urgent food, clothing, and financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses).



As critical is our support of work to address systemic barriers to quality, stable, affordable housing, including the [Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network](#) and the policy agenda of [CT CAN End Homelessness](#).

Connecticut's homelessness response system continues to struggle from inadequate funding as the demand for services continues to rise.

- In 2024, there was a 13 percent increase in homelessness and a 79 percent increase in calls to 2-1-1 for housing and shelter.
- There are currently over 5,000 people experiencing homelessness, with more than 900 having no shelter.

In 2024, there were 20,706 scheduled Coordinated Access Network (CAN) appointments, 4,468 people diverted from shelter, and 7,567 people served by emergency shelter, transitional housing, and street outreach. The foundation has testified in support of efforts to provide substantial and long-term support for homelessness prevention and mitigation services. Even if these efforts are successful, it is unlikely that homelessness will be completely eradicated in our state, but the foundation remains committed to working with nonprofits and public-private community partners to make substantial, meaningful progress each year towards reducing homelessness and housing instability.

The June 2024 U.S. Supreme Court Case of **City of Grants Pass v. Johnson** ruled that cities can punish people experiencing homelessness for sleeping in public spaces, even when there is no shelter available. Essentially this gives municipalities the ability to enforce fines and arrest people for public camping and threatens people with jail time if who refuse to move indoors or accept assistance. Homelessness frontline workers and advocates have fought against this ruling which essentially criminalizes homelessness, recognizing that these acts will only worsen conditions for unhoused individuals.

[Research](#) from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty has shown that criminalizing homelessness can have a ripple effect on physical and mental health outcomes. Additionally, BIPOC individuals, who comprise around [60 percent of homeless](#) populations, are more likely to experience homelessness and be targeted by police for enforcement than white individuals. Individuals experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQIA+ are also more likely to be marginalized by criminalization.

The foundation supports House Bill 7033 which establishes legal protections for homeless individuals when performing life-sustaining activities in public spaces. The bill prohibits municipalities from creating ordinances that discriminate against homeless individuals and guarantees specific rights, including conducting necessary life-sustaining activities on public land without obstructing traffic, using public accommodations without discrimination, soliciting donations, maintaining privacy of personal property, practicing religion, and occupying vehicles when parked legally. The bill allows these activities only if they do not create safety hazards and, in some cases, only if no adequate alternative indoor space is available. We appreciate the safeguards proposed, which balance the use of public space by people who are homeless. We fully recognize that people who are homeless often have little or no



options and need municipalities to support them in utilizing public spaces in ways that does not impact community safety.

The foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, philanthropy, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that will ensure all Connecticut residents have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

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.