



## **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on**

### **House Bill 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making Appropriations Therefor (Judicial and Corrections)**

#### **Appropriations Judicial and Corrections Subcommittee February 24, 2023**

Good evening, Senator Winfield, Representative Candelaria, Senator Berthel, Representative Callahan and distinguished members of the Appropriations Judicial and Corrections Subcommittee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on **House Bill 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making Appropriations Therefor (Judicial and Corrections)**. The Foundation specifically is testifying in support of a proposal to reallocate the \$6.5 million in savings from the closing of the Willard Correctional Institution to create a new Justice Reinvestment Fund at the Department of Correction's budget.

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** In the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$99 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 \$940 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase stable employment that advance careers for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment. Our efforts work towards accelerating inclusive economic growth and increasing opportunities for engaging people who often have been left behind. This requires us to educate, train, and retain talent, including underserved and underrepresented populations, to meet the needs of employers more fully.

The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing training opportunities, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

While philanthropy anticipates continuing to provide financial support, adequate public support is essential if we are to address the enormous basic human needs in employment, education, and other programs, including access to food, mental and physical health care, and housing to support the success of participants. No one entity can do this work alone. Our shared interest is supporting successful reintegration that promotes community safety by reducing recidivism. This requires providing adequate support to the nonprofit and government organizations delivering these services.

Research has demonstrated that people employed after release from incarceration are less likely to return to prison. Using time in prison to develop essential skills can increase the ability of people once released to qualify for jobs in the community. We need to be equally committed to ensuring access to education, workforce development as well as substance abuse treatment and other health programs for men and women incarcerated, and as they rebuild their lives in the community. This is an essential



strategy for preparing for successful reentry. **The creation of a new Justice Reinvestment Fund in the Department of Correction's budget would make a major contribution to this effort.** How the savings are used needs to be informed by multiple community voices, including the men and women who have been incarcerated as well as service providers.

Since 2016, the Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including preemployment training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford and the BEST Chance Program. The programs provide individuals with access to basic services and referrals to numerous other programs. Both programs receive some support from government partners. Committing additional resources will continue the public-private partnerships needed to sustain the work demonstrated effective in addressing the critical needs across justice system involved populations.

Over the past three years, the Foundation also supported the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) expansions of legal services available to Greater Hartford youth ages 16 to 23 transitioning from confinement to address access to education, employment, and other basic needs. CCA is part of the ecosystem of nonprofits working with Roca, COMPASS Youth Collaborative, and Our Piece of the Pie to address the needs of opportunity youth in Hartford, each of which have been supported by a collaboration with the Hartford Foundation, the City of Hartford and Dalio Education. The Foundation has also provided support to Asnuntuck Community College for its Second Chance Pell (SCP) incarcerated students in Enfield correctional facilities.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced the need to acknowledge key issues including:

- The stigma of incarceration can undermine the ability of returning citizens to successfully reenter into the community and to access training, secure employment and other services.
- With access to training that leads to jobs, people coming home from prison have the ability make a successful transition and contribute to their families and community.

Community-based reentry workforce training programs ideally need to build on programming people receive *while in prison* to support continuity and avoid duplication. We would encourage DOC to make significant new investments in education and vocational programming, including providing training to support soft skills that many employers see as critical in preparing people for entering the workforce. We encourage legislators to continue to identify long-term resources that can support and sustain improvements in the justice system that can address the longstanding racial and economic disparities.

The greatest challenge to creating career opportunities for returning citizens is finding employers willing to consider giving them an opportunity. Our investments in supporting returning citizens have shown us that, with support from employers, people can make a successful reentry into the community.

We need to ensure that education and training institutions have what they need to build the skills and deliver the experiences returning citizens need to succeed in the 21st century. We also recognize that businesses must play a larger role in guiding the content of education and workforce training programs



to meet their needs. We must also support businesses in exploring ways to ensure their work environments are inclusive and supportive of all workers.

There is already an array of services available to returning citizens to ensure returning workers are successful in the workplace. Not only are there programs implemented by longstanding nonprofits, but also new programs led by people with lived experience offering additional services that deserve support. Services that can address individual needs are critical to sustaining jobs and advancing career pathways, and successful reentry. **Allocating additional financial resources to make more of these wraparound services available would make a meaningful contribution to ensuring that people can successfully reintegrate and contribute to their communities.**

In its 2014 [report](#), the Council of State Governments Justice Center highlighted Connecticut's bipartisan efforts to become the first state to enact justice reinvestment legislation. In 2008, legislators passed additional data-driven criminal justice reforms, and the state experienced improved public safety outcomes including a decrease in overall crime rates including violent and property crimes. The state also saw a significant increase in its prison population.

Since Connecticut's groundbreaking justice reinvestment legislation was first enacted nearly two decades ago, 34 other states have worked to pass similar data-driven legislation. We now have the opportunity to continue to ensure that Connecticut is a leader in making meaningful reinvestments to keep people out of prisons and improve public safety.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, government partners, advocates, and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment and access to supports for returning citizens to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce, achieve economic stability, and have opportunities to reach their potential, thrive and enhance Connecticut's economy.

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