



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony in support of
House Bill 6431, An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons
Housing Committee
February 18, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony **in support of on House Bill 6431, An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets, in 2020, the Foundation distributed a record-breaking \$52 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 \$837 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 the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods.** Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

The Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the numbers of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods both by increasing the opportunities in Hartford neighborhoods and by increasing the ability of Hartford residents to choose to move to other higher opportunity areas throughout the Greater Hartford region. In order to support these outcomes, 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 social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods. COVID has reinforced the need for all of us to live in safe, stable homes, in safe, stable neighborhoods, in safe, stable communities.

Public commitment must address the interplay of basic human needs, including access to food, mental and physical health care services, housing and other needs, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations providing these services.

The Hartford Foundation **supports House Bill 6431, An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons which seeks to prohibit housing providers from considering a prospective tenant's criminal conviction after certain time periods.** Since 2007, the Hartford Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including pre-employment training and job

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placement and retention assistance. Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced the fact that housing is an essential resource, without which most people cannot succeed.

The Foundation's recent [evaluation](#) of the first year of the Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center and our work with homeless providers has taught us that lack of access to housing is a significant barrier for justice involved people.

Participants in the evaluation generally agreed that the most critical and widespread unmet need for people released at the end of their sentences from prison or jail is for stable housing.

- More than half (52 percent) of the people who walked into the Welcome Center sought assistance with housing.
- Many of the walk-in visitors to the Center were experiencing homelessness.
- The most urgent unmet need is for End-of-Sentence participants referred to the Center by the Department of Correction had nowhere to stay. While counselors made every effort to call 211 before they were released, returning citizens were often denied access to a shelter or placed on a waitlist for the shelter system.

The evaluation included a recommendation to improve access to safe and stable housing options in collaboration with shelter/housing partners and the City of Hartford.

We know that people often experience significant discrimination upon their reentry back into the community. House Bill 6431 would be a powerful tool in the effort to remove a serious barrier for formerly incarcerated residents seeking access to housing. Without access to housing, returning citizens will continue to struggle to find jobs, reconnect with their families, and lead productive and successful lives.

Research confirms that access to stable, affordable, quality housing is a key pathway to economic mobility and that inclusive economic mobility yields greater economic growth. The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and municipalities to promote inclusive development principles, ensuring all residents, including returning citizens, have the opportunity to thrive.

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.