

## Hartford Foundation Testimony in Support of

### **House Bill 6228, An Act Prohibiting Institutions of Higher Education from Inquiring About a Prospective Students Criminal History During the Admissions Process and Establishing a Prison Education Program Office**

#### **Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

**March 2, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to testify **in support of House Bill 6228, An Act Prohibiting Institutions of Higher Education from Inquiring About a Prospective Students Criminal History During the Admissions Process and Establishing a Prison Education Program Office.**

**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 stable employment opportunities for adults and youth in region facing barriers to employment.

This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to employment options that provide a sustaining wage. In Greater Hartford, there are a number of job openings, but there is misalignment between the skillsets required and the skills of the current workforce. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work. Among students in Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts, our efforts aim to increase employment and career exposure and increase post-secondary degree and credential completion, including 2Gen approaches that focus training, childcare and other supports to the needs in families. The Foundation's work also includes job creation for Black and Latinx residents through locally owned small businesses and increasing access to capital for Black and Latinx small business owners and entrepreneurs.

There must be a public commitment to addressing basic human needs, including access to food, mental and physical health care services, and housing, in supporting the success of participants in employment programs. This requires providing adequate support to the nonprofit organizations delivering these services.

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We need to be equally committed to ensuring access to education programs for men and women incarcerated as an essential strategy for preparing them for employment and successful reentry. The **Foundation supports House Bill 6228's creation of a new office that would be responsible for (1) approving and facilitating higher education institutions operating prison education programs at correctional facilities in the state, (2) coordinating facilitation of prison education programs in partnership with approved institutions of higher education, and (3) providing equitable access to resources required for the successful completion of prison education programs, including, but not limited to, classrooms, study areas and any necessary electronic devices.**

According to a study conducted by the Urban Institute, involvement in postsecondary correctional education has positive effects on inmate behavior and creates a safer prison environment. Stakeholders at the facility commonly reported that postsecondary correctional education that leads to obtaining employment reduces recidivism.

This past year, the Hartford Foundation provided Asnuntuck Community College a \$45,485 grant to increase access to technology for Second Chance Pell (SCP) students (inmates) in Enfield correctional facilities to restart classes that had been terminated due to COVID-19, and for students enrolled on campus to be able to continue their studies in a remote learning environment. Funds have been allocated toward the purchase of technology to support distance learning at the prison and laptops for other Asnuntuck students. This most recent grant builds on Asnuntuck's involvement in prison education programs. In 2016, Asnuntuck began offering a variety of certificate programs to 308 incarcerated individuals as part of the original Second Chance Pell federal pilot program. Asnuntuck provided instruction at its Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center (AMTC), in Enfield, as well as at the MacDougall, Osborn, Robinson and Willard Cybulski correctional facilities in the disciplines of Business Administration, Human Services Management and Advanced Manufacturing Technology. Asnuntuck is now one of four community colleges within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system to participate in the Second Chance Pell Program.

Hartford Foundation donor-advised funds historically have provided support for Wesleyan University's Center for Prison Education which offers prisoners at the Cheshire Correctional Institution (CI) and York CI, a men's maximum security prison and Connecticut's only women's state prison with the opportunity to take accredited Wesleyan and Middlesex courses.

The Foundation has provided more than \$800,000 in support of Capital Workforce Partner's BEST Chance reentry program since its launch in 2015. The program integrates a modified Integrated Basic Skills and Education Training & Employment model. The BEST Chance partnership includes the Connecticut Departments of Labor, Correction, Social Services and nonprofit organizations, and training partners in manufacturing, culinary and construction. The program provides outreach, assessment, work readiness training, customer service training, academic support, participant stipends, support services, and job placement and retention.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have shown us how the stigma of incarceration undermines the ability of returning citizens who seek opportunities for education, employment, housing and successful reentry into the community. It is for this reason **the Foundation supports House Bill 6228's provisions to prohibit Connecticut institutions of higher education to inquire about a prospective student's prior arrests, criminal charges or convictions on an application for admission to**



**such institution, or for enrollment in any program of study offered by such institution, or consider a student's prior arrests in the admissions process for such student, or determining the eligibility of such student for any form of financial aid, grant or scholarship program, including, but not limited to, institutional financial aid.**

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment for Black and Latinx residents to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce and achieve economic stability, and have opportunities to 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.