

Hartford Foundation Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 881, An Act Concerning Workforce Development
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 Senate Bill 881, An Act Concerning Workforce Development.**

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.**

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. This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to employment options that provide a sustaining wage.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving President Jay Williams served as a member of Governor Lamont's Workforce Council to support Connecticut's efforts to create a better pipeline between high school and postsecondary education, increasing access to workforce training programs, and improving use and collection of workforce data. The Foundation offers its support of **support of Senate Bill 881, An Act Concerning Workforce Development** as it seeks to restructure state agencies responsible for education and workforce development to more nimbly and effectively help residents achieve their education and workforce goals.

The Foundation also applauds the bill's inclusion of measures that could contribute to more high school students accessing Pell grants and going on to post-secondary education. These

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efforts include the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program which will also encourage students to stay in Connecticut for college and beyond.

As an organization that has invested millions of dollars to provide scholarships for four and two-year degrees and nondegree credentials, including \$1.7 million in scholarships awarded to more than 650 students for the for 2020-2021 academic year, the Foundation also supports the following proposals:

- Requiring completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, a similar state form for students who are undocumented, or a waiver in order for students to graduate from high school or adult education programs in Connecticut;
- Creating an auto-admission program at the four campuses of the Connecticut State Universities to increase access to college for academically prepared high school students by simplifying the application process and removing application fees;
- Increasing access to Advanced Placement, dual credit, early college, and other high-quality courses by requiring that districts not prohibit students from taking such courses based solely on prior academic performance, and that districts automatically enroll students in advanced coursework if a student is academically prepared; and
- Creating an expanded transit pass program, similar to the UPass program used by students at the state's public colleges and universities, that is open additional institutions including the state's private universities and other training providers. The Foundation has provided support for transportation programs for college students and workforce training recognizing its role in allowing students and trainees to regularly attend classes.
- Raising high school dropout age to 18.
- Allowing CHESLA to offer student loans for nondegree credentials.

The Foundation supports the creation of an Office of Workforce Strategy, which will help improve coordination among state agencies integral to workforce development efforts. OWS will support agencies in reviewing program design and improving outcomes, including using data collected pursuant to this bill. OWS will help position the state to be more competitive for federal grant opportunities. The Foundation hopes that this new office will also work with nonprofit organizations providing workforce training to support program alignment with the state's workforce goals. OWS can also build relationships with foundation and other philanthropic workforce development investors to strengthen public/private partnerships.

The Foundation also offers its support for Governor Lamont's proposal to use \$40 million in state bond funding to create the CareerConneCT workforce training initiative to provide high-quality training to thousands of residents who have lost their jobs during the COVID pandemic.

Recently the Foundation awarded grants to several of Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts in an effort to reduce barriers to academic progress and increase equitable opportunities in students' K-12 course of study. By mitigating barriers and promoting equity, our investments also contribute to increased high



school graduation rates in these districts. Obtaining a high school diploma puts young people on a path to employability and earning higher incomes and contributes to the Foundation's long-term goal of increasing stable employment for youth in the region who might otherwise face barriers to

employment. The Foundation also endorses the legislation's provisions promoting early career exposure and developing success plans that outline career pathways beginning in the 6th grade.

The Hartford Foundation has also supported a variety of efforts to help first generation Black and Latinx college students beyond initial enrollment. We recognize that many first generation college students who successfully enroll in college often struggle to make it through their first year and ultimately graduate. This includes assisting with college admission paperwork, college visits, transition to college counseling, and pairing college students with volunteer mentors in high school and continuing those relationships through their first year. These services have evolved over time to better respond to student needs, including identifying various social groups and activities and the availability of mental health services, as many college students experience stress and anxiety during their transition to college life.

This past fall, the Foundation awarded five grants to organizations seeking to assist students who have worked hard to advance their studies but have been struggling to overcome the additional challenges that have arisen throughout 2020. The organizations are offering students at Asnuntuck, Capital, and Manchester Community Colleges, Goodwin University and Hartford Promise by leveraging a combination of wraparound supports, including increased access to technology or related supports for remote learning; academic and social integration peer mentoring or coaching; microgrants to address basic human needs or enable access to books or academic materials; and stipends for students to replace lost income.

These wraparound supports have been effective for both post-secondary credential and degree programs as well as for more traditional workforce training programs to ensure that youth and adults with the greatest barriers to completion are able to complete their course of study. These supports extend beyond academic support and include transportation, childcare, basic human needs, such as food. The Foundation encourages the legislature to provide resources to support these services to ensure that residents with the greatest barriers to obtaining a job with family-sustaining wages have the opportunity to participate and complete college and career training programs.

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 or 860-548-1888.