



Hartford Foundation

FOR PUBLIC GIVING

501 State Street, Suite 200  
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**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony in support of**

**Senate Bill 194, An Act Establishing a Right to Housing**

**Senate Bill 355, An Act Concerning a Landlord's Ability to Consider the Criminal Record of Prospective Tenants**

**Senate Bill 875, An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction**

**Senate Bill 880, An Act Concerning Payments in Lieu of Taxes to Municipalities for Housing Authorities**

**House Bill 6521, An Act Concerning Changes to Zoning and Affordable Housing Requirements Concerning Accessory Dwelling Units and Prohibiting List-Back Agreements**

**House Bill 6531, An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings**

**House Bill 6532, An Act Appropriating State Funds for Mental Health Services and Housing**

**Housing Committee**

**March 4, 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 **Senate Bills 194, 355, 875, and 880** **House Bills 6521, 6528, 6531 and 6532.**

**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

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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.

On an annual basis, the Foundation provides approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations to provide access to emergency shelter, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention/landlord negotiation, employment services, and housing services to residents' at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. Research confirms that stable housing and neighborhoods 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 secure healthy, safe and affordable housing so vital to ensuring all residents have the opportunity to thrive.

**The Foundation offers its support for Senate Bill 194, An Act Establishing a Right to Housing which directs state agencies to consider the right to housing when adopting policies and regulations prioritizing the interests of those below 50 percent of the median income.**

We credit the committee for including an expansive list of policy prescriptions and recommendations for state investments including (particularly those disproportionately impacted including people of color, returning citizens, LGBTQ adults and youth), legal aid and financial assistance.

The Foundation also supports the bills provision to create a Right to Housing Committee to review policies that includes a wide range of representation from those most impacted by a lack of access to housing. We see the benefit of the legislation's creation of a Housing Advocate position within the Department of Housing to review policies and respond to concerns and complaints. We would also encourage the committee to consider providing additional tools to empower the Housing Advocate to resolve complaints and grievances to ensure that existing housing discrimination laws are enforced.

For many years, the Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including pre employment training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford and the BEST Chance Program, which provide individuals with access to basic services and referrals to programs. The Foundation's first year evaluation of the Reentry Welcome Center's operation revealed the need for additional work and policy changes, first and foremost in housing access.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have shown us how the stigma of incarceration undermines the ability of returning citizens who seek opportunities for housing, education, and employment to successfully reenter into the community. **It is for this reason the Foundation supports**

**Senate Bill 355 which would require the Commissioner of Housing to adopt regulations concerning a limited time period for which a landlord may consider the criminal record of a prospective tenant.**

The Foundation also endorses **Senate Bill 875, An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction, which directs the DOC to assess the risk of homelessness for incarcerated persons released from its custody and to create a program to address such homelessness and to require additional reports to measure the extent of such homelessness.**

Providing adequate transition planning before release that effectively connects returning citizens to services following release, including housing resources, is recognized as a best practice. Enhancing transition planning is highlighted in the recommendations in Connecticut's Commission on Equity and Opportunity's December 2018 Reentry Housing Report, developed with a diversity of housing, legal aid, other nonprofit, as well as research, foundation and other representatives. We urge the committee to continue to collect and integrate input from diverse stakeholders working to address the housing needs of returning citizens, including anchoring this work in the perspectives of people with lived experience. This will support development of a comprehensive, effective and well-resourced program.

The Foundation also **supports Senate Bill 880, An Act Concerning Payments in Lieu of Taxes to Municipalities for Housing Authorities**, which proposes to pay 77 percent of the property tax obligation. We support this bill but would prefer the passage of the similar House bill that would provide 100 percent of taxes that would have been paid of taxable properties.

The state needs a substantial increase in the supply of deed-restricted affordable housing units. This bill would create an opportunity for communities to provide the state with more of these units while allowing them to maintain local property tax rolls. While this would require substantial state investments, they could provide the type of positive incentives necessary to allow municipalities to diversify their communities and create more affordable housing to strengthen the long-term future of our state. PILOT payments to municipalities that are stepping up and supporting the state's housing goals are a part of this investment. Currently it is our urban communities that are carrying the load in supporting the affordable housing needs of entire regions. They deserve to be adequately compensated for their contributions.

The Hartford Foundation's work to give more Hartford residents the choice to live in higher opportunity neighborhoods includes strategies to develop a wide variety of affordable housing, including apartments, duplexes, multi-family housing and accessory dwelling units. ADUs can play a role in creating more affordable housing options for older disabled people who may need to live close by family members of caregivers and also represent an affordable option for low and middle-income residents including young adults. For these reasons, the Foundation **endorses House Bill 6521, An Act Concerning Changes to Zoning and Affordable Housing Requirements Concerning Accessory Dwelling Units and Prohibiting List-Back Agreements.** But the Foundation also recognizes that this is but one of many policy changes that need to be enacted to expand access to safe, quality, affordable housing in high opportunity neighborhoods in every Connecticut community.



**The Foundation also endorses House Bill 6531, An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings.** Evictions have devastating long-term impacts on families and we know that while the vast majority of landlords in eviction proceedings have an attorney, only a small minority of tenants do and this usually results in tenants losing their cases. At a time when thousands of Connecticut households are threatened by potential evictions once existing housing moratoriums end, this legislation is a vital tool to ensuring that tenants have a more equitable opportunity to remain in their homes.

The Hartford Foundation also offers its support for **House Bill 6532, An Act Appropriating State Funds for Mental Health Services and Housing.** Through its investments to prevent and reduce homelessness, we recognize the challenges faced by individuals living with mental health challenges and substance abuse disorders and the need for housing support and counseling services. This proposal to allocate \$1 million to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to hire housing coordinators and \$4 million to expand DMHAS' respite services and other short-term stabilization services for individuals with substance abuse and other mental health conditions, will have a significant impact on reducing homelessness in Connecticut.

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut families have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods in both our cities and our suburbs.

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.