



## **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony to Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee**

**November 5, 2021**

Good morning, Chairman Woods and members of the Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on the programs we support to enhance public safety and reduce community and gun violence. The Foundation appreciates the Committees efforts to not only receive input from public safety, law enforcement, emergency first responders, criminal justice representatives, violence prevention professionals and activists, but also engage with people who have lived experience dealing with violence and the justice system as this is a cornerstone of the work we do.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. We manage approximately \$1 billion in assets, distributing \$52 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region.

This testimony focuses on the Foundation's support for violence prevention efforts and believe public-private partnerships have an important role to play. Both sectors must work together to implement strategies that engage youth and recognize and build on their inherent abilities. We are stronger together and we encourage the public sector to join the Hartford Foundation and growing number of local and national philanthropic and nonprofit organizations in prioritizing in policy and funding trauma-informed, asset-based programs and services.

Applying an equity lens is critical to developing effective solutions. This effort also requires better local crime data, so we know who the perpetrators of crime actually are. This will allow us to address the often-unsubstantiated perception that youth are solely responsible. Our work also seeks to recognize the impact on victims and their families. With an historic federal investment in our state and local government, now is the time for collaboration to realize these goals that can support the health of our youth and their communities.

As part of our work to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to address this using multiple strategies working in partnership—from supporting basic human needs, community organizing, increased employment of black and Latinx residents including artists of color, to increasing the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods in and outside the city.

The Foundation awards grants to organizations engaged in violence prevention, intervention, trauma informed care and youth development and engagement services. For example, since November 2018, the Foundation has supported several Hartford nonprofit agencies that formed the Hartford Community Safety Coalition (CSC), a collaborative effort to create healthy communities through a reduction of violence and trauma in Hartford.

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The Hartford Foundation has focused on opportunity youth, who are not in school or working and may be involved in the foster care or the juvenile justice systems. Data continue to show that youth of color are far more likely to be referred to juvenile justice services than their white peers, and at younger ages. Early involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a lasting impact, disconnecting youth from their families and communities and limiting their access to opportunities and often making it more challenging to achieve their potential. And given what we know about youth brain development and risky behavior they can engage in, the Foundation supported raising the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction from age seven to age 12. This has resulted in a more developmentally appropriate approach by utilizing existing support, mentoring and counseling provided by the state, youth service bureaus, nonprofit community-based services and juvenile review boards.

Despite significant challenges faced by opportunity youth, national research demonstrates that focused, place-based and holistic approaches can tap the resilience possessed by many opportunity youth, helping them to re-engage with school and work and preventing disconnection in the first place. Together, our grants have built upon the Foundation's historic investments in opportunity youth and meet the clear and urgent need for interventions in support of young mothers and other youth and address the rising gun violence and impacts of COVID-19.

The Foundation recognizes there are many other efforts and community-based organizations in Hartford that create an ecosystem of youth-serving agencies. Our grantmaking to support collaboration among proximate, violence interrupters in Hartford through the launch of the Community Safety Coalition has highlighted the ongoing need for increased coordination among organizations in this space and other youth development prevention and intervention programs that have the training and capacity to provide ongoing support to youth at risk of involvement in community violence.

These efforts are designed to meet youth where they are and offer consistent, long-term engagement. We know from our work that youth and young adults need *meaningful* opportunities to develop their skills and to navigate life with support. The best programs give participating youth the ability to inform and lead program activities. Interventions like the Hartford Youth Service Corps also provide young people with the opportunity to give back to their community, and for the community to see inner city youth supporting residents in their neighborhoods, while providing a paycheck so youth can support themselves and help their families.

In 2018, the Foundation awarded a three-year, \$260,000 grant to the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) to expand its services to adolescents and young adults from Greater Hartford who are making the difficult transition from justice-system confinement or Department of Children and Families involvement. CCA's legal support provides the groundwork that can help youth reestablish important connections, find a safe place to live, get back into school or get a job that leads toward future security.

As you are aware, **restorative justice** focuses on rehabilitation by reconciling issues an individual needs address with their victims and the community at large. CCA used a portion of the Foundation's grant to partner with the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University to implement restorative practices in Connecticut's two secure juvenile detention facilities (which are operated by the Judicial Branch), and the secure facility that houses youth under 18 who are charged and sentenced in the adult criminal justice system (which is operated by the Department of Correction (DOC)). As more jurisdictions are



using restorative practices, we are seeing fewer youth involved in the justice system, by helping to ensure that they are supported in building new skills to be successful.

In 2020, the Foundation partnered with the Travelers Championship to co-fund a \$400,000 police training initiative led by the University of New Haven's Center for Advanced Policing and Tow Youth Justice Institute. The **Connecticut Institute for Youth and Police Relations** program is working with police departments throughout Greater Hartford to help officers in balancing the demands of public safety and the best interests of Black, Latinx and other diverse youth. A program goal is to build bridges between the police and communities they serve. Instruction is provided by University of New Haven faculty with expertise in youth justice, child development, and community policing. The curriculum also includes conversations with justice-involved youth and staff from agencies that serve youth. The focus is on changing approaches to situations that arise in the field and strategies for deescalating them while integrating restorative justice approaches. The first class of 14 officers graduated in September and has begun implementing these strategies in their local departments in Hartford, West Hartford, East Hartford, Glastonbury, Bristol, Windsor, and the University of Connecticut.

This year, the Foundation, along with its partners the Dalio Education and Tow Foundation, and the City of Hartford announced a \$9.6 million investment to support opportunity youth, individuals aged 16 through 24 who are currently disengaged from school or work. The funding will go to [COMPASS Youth Collaborative](#), [Our Piece of the Pie](#) (OPP) and [Roca, Inc.](#) The Foundation's funds provide flexible, core support to these organizations for individualized, trauma-informed, and high-touch programs.

- Roca is a national youth-serving organization that is currently working in Massachusetts and Maryland. It is now operating in Hartford, specifically [serving young women, including young mothers who are victims of abuse and neglect](#).
- OPP is significantly increasing the capacity of the [Youth Service Corps](#), allowing it to serve additional young people, in addition to the approximately 250 youth they currently serve each year. Mayor Luke Bronin led the creation of the Youth Service Corps in 2016 to give young people part-time jobs as well as one-on-one coaching and mentoring.
- COMPASS is expanding its [Peacebuilders](#) program, increasing the number of violence interrupters in Hartford working to de-escalate conflict and build relationships with the hardest to reach youth.

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 live in safe, healthy, and strong neighborhoods. Now more than ever opportunity youth need us to recognize and build on their individual strengths and to commit to helping them reach their potential for themselves, their families and their communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfp.org](mailto:policy@hfp.org) or 860-548-1888.