



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony In Support of
House Bill 5248, An Act Concerning Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions
on Occupational Licensing
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 3, 2022**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Sampson, Representative Arora and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of Senate Bill 5248, An Act Concerning Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Conviction.**

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 the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$97 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 \$894 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 our region facing barriers to employment. The Foundation's efforts integrate work with the Capitol Region Council of State Governments, the Metro Hartford Alliance, and stakeholders to advance a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Our efforts work towards accelerating inclusive economic growth and increasing opportunities for engaging people who often have been left behind. This requires us to educate, train, and retain talent, including underserved and underrepresented populations, to meet the needs of employers more fully.

The Hartford Foundation's investments recognize that all residents of our region need access to training and 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 training opportunities, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work, and may also be involved in the justice system.

The Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford and the BEST Chance program, a public-private partnership led by Capital Workforce Partners. Both programs provide individuals with access to basic services and referrals to other programs as needed. Over the past three years, the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) also expanded legal services available to Greater Hartford youth ages 16 to 23 transitioning from confinement to address access to education,



employment, and other basic needs. CCA is part of the ecosystem of nonprofits working with Roca, COMPASS Youth Collaborative, and Our Piece of the Pie to address the needs of opportunity youth in Hartford. The Foundation has also provided support to Asnuntuck Community College for its Second Chance Pell (SCP) incarcerated students in Enfield correctional facilities.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced the need to acknowledge key issues including:

- The stigma of incarceration can undermine the ability of returning citizens to successfully reenter into the community and their ability to secure employment and other services.
- With access to jobs, the men and women coming home from prison have the ability make a successful transition and contribute to their families and community.

People who have a criminal record face multiple barriers to employment, including exclusion from certain professional licenses, limited access to housing, and other opportunities. Because Black and Latinx people are disproportionately incarcerated, they are similarly disproportionately rejected by employers when they return to the community.

Research by the Urban Institute has indicated that having a legitimate job lessens the chances of reoffending following release from prison, and that recidivism is less likely among people with higher wages and higher quality jobs. Good jobs not only provide the means for basic survival, but also is key in rebuilding self-esteem and a sense of belonging in the community. **House Bill 5248 would allow access to a range of occupational licenses to people with criminal records by requiring consideration of whether a criminal conviction is reasonably related to the ability to safely or competently perform the duties or responsibilities associated with the license.**

We must commit to providing job opportunities for previously incarcerated men and women as they rebuild their lives in the community. It is also vital that returning citizens have access to job opportunities that pay living wages that allow them to support themselves and their families. For these reasons, the Hartford Foundation offers its support of House Bill 5248, which seeks to limit some of the barriers that prevent returning citizens from obtaining occupational licenses.

We also support the bill's approach to require a balanced assessment to determine whether there is a relationship between the past offense and the license sought while maintaining reasonable provisions for considering license permits, revocations or suspensions. for which they are applying.

The greatest challenge to creating career opportunities for returning citizens is finding employers willing to consider giving them an opportunity. Our investments in supporting returning citizens have shown us that with support people can make a successful reentry into the community. **For this reason, the Foundation supports the bill's inclusion of a measure to prohibit from blanket bans on people with criminal records to be considered for occupational licenses. It is important to note that this requirement already exists for governmental employers, this section would extend the requirement.** Five states including California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, and Wisconsin have enacted provisions in their fair employment to prevent discrimination based on records of arrest or conviction. Connecticut should embrace this approach as well.



The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment for returning citizens to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce, achieve economic stability, and have opportunities to support themselves and their families, and enhance Connecticut's economy and communities.

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.