



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony In Support of  
Senate Bill 334, An Act Establishing A Program To Make Preparing For And Taking The  
Commercial Learner Permit Knowledge Test Available For Incarcerated Persons  
Transportation Committee**

**March 9, 2022**

Good afternoon, Senator Haskell, Representative Lemar, Senator Somers, Representative Carney and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of Senate Bill 334, An Act Establishing A Program To Make Preparing For And Taking the Commercial Learner Permit Knowledge Test Available For Incarcerated Persons**

**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 and meaningful employment opportunities for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment, including citizens returning from incarceration. The Foundation's efforts align with the work of Capitol Region Council of State Governments, the Metro Hartford Alliance, and other stakeholders to advance a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

All residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a career pathway and 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.

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

Research has demonstrated that people employed after release are less likely to return to prison. Using time in prison to develop essential skills can increase their ability to qualify for living wage jobs in the community.

**We also need to be committed to ensuring access to education and workforce development programs for men and women while they are incarcerated as an essential strategy for preparing for**

**employment and successful reentry. For these reasons the Foundation supports Senate Bill 334, An Act Establishing A Program To Make Preparing For And Taking The Commercial Learner Permit Knowledge Test Available For Incarcerated Persons. A best practice is ensuring that training programs and other supports provided in correctional facilities effectively connect to supports provided in the community following release.**

The Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including preemployment training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford and the BEST Chance Program, which provides individuals with access to basic services and referrals to numerous other programs. Over the past three years, the Center for Children’s Advocacy (CCA) 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) program 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 the community, access training, and secure employment and other services.
- With access to training that leads to jobs, the men and women coming home from prison have the ability make a successful transition and contribute to their families and community.

Providing commercial driver’s license training to eligible incarcerated individuals who are reentering the community in six months or less is critical to providing returning citizens with the skills they need to obtain a good paying job. Truckers are needed to address supply chain challenges.

The Foundation appreciates the proposed collaboration between the Department of Correction (DOC) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to expand the CDL test to accommodate administration of the commercial license permit test as part of distance learning programs inside DOC facilities. This would allow people to apply what they learn right away and could serve as an incentive for pursuing the driving portion after release.

The Foundation supports this initiative. To ensure its success, the commitment must also extend to providing sufficient funding not only to cover the costs of the distance learning program at DOC facilities, but also the actual road training and securing the commercial driver’s license, which would be cost prohibitive for many returning citizens. Perhaps this plan could include a voucher system at DMV or other approaches that would ensure that participants can easily access once released to cover some or all the costs once they are successful in completing the permit course.



In addition, it is important to recognize that the greatest challenge to creating career opportunities for returning citizens is finding employers willing to provide opportunities. The Foundation's investments in supporting returning citizens have shown us that, with support, people can make a successful transition to the community. We recommend that the program identify employers willing to hire returning citizens and have them meet with program participants virtually to explain the types of jobs available and what the work requires. Prior to participating, people also need enough information to consider whether the work would be a good fit for them. Some returning citizens' travel can be restricted initially if released under parole or probation supervision, so program participants need to take that into consideration. In addition, it is important to screen participants for pre-existing medical conditions and medications that might prevent them from obtaining a CDL.

One of the Foundation's earlier investments included support of a commercial driver's license training program. The firms providing CDL road training were anxious to take recruits into the program, only to find that after people completed the course, some employers were reluctant to hire people with a criminal record. **Identifying employers willing to hire returning citizens is an essential part of creating an effective workforce development initiative of this kind.**

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 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.