



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on

Senate Bill 387, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee

Judiciary Committee

March 14, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony **on Senate Bill 387, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.**

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 invests in efforts remove barriers to economic success and increase social cohesion and the perception of community safety in Hartford. To help accomplish this, the Foundation invests in programs and systems-building to provide education, job training and other youth services to support their success and prevent incidences of violence and interventions that divert youth from incarceration, when appropriate, and support their families.

The Hartford Foundation has focused on opportunity youth, individuals aged 16 through 24 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, often making it more challenging to achieve their full potential.

We support Senate Bill 387's inclusion of a community-based diversion system, and to expand it, as needed, for use by police officers instead of arresting children, when appropriate, as outlined in the legislation. As we look to expand the diversion programming, we offer the approach taken as we looked to expand the support to young mothers. The work required using data to demonstrate the unmet need and engaging youth-serving and other stakeholders to explore services needed. This helped to ensure that the infusion of funding did not duplicate services.

This past year, the Foundation, along with its partners Dalio Education and Tow Foundation, and the City of Hartford announced a \$9.6 million investment to support opportunity youth. The funding goes to [COMPASS Youth Collaborative](#), **(COMPASS)**, [Our Piece of the Pie \(OPP\)](#) and [Roca, Inc.](#) Roca is a Boston-based youth-serving organization now operating in Hartford, specifically serving young women, including young mothers who are victims of abuse and neglect [in Hartford, specifically serving young women, including young mothers who are victims of abuse and neglect](#)

After engaging with state and municipal youth-serving agencies, Roca found that there are many young women who are known for their involvement in or instigation of gun violence but have not been arrested or charged. In addition, current programs for young mothers were not yet reaching the most traumatized and high-risk population. Roca chose to focus primarily on young mothers, knowing that there were no existing programs for young women who have lost, or are at risk of losing custody of their children. There is still a significant need for interventions that create safe spaces for high-risk young women who, due to past trauma, cannot easily be served alongside young men.



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Roca's work is designed to complement services provided by the other local youth-serving agencies. COMPASS serves youth who are closely touched by violence, predominately males, and OPP serves youth who may be ready to reconnect to school and employment but still need significant supports. COMPASS is experienced in connecting to high-risk youth, engaging them in relationships to provide support and opportunities that help them become ready, willing, and able to succeed in education, employment, and life. OPP engages youth ages 14 to 24 facing multiple obstacles, some at risk of dropping out of school or already have or involved in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. Others are underemployed or both out of school and work. OPP has structured its programs to help youth overcome systemic barriers and guide them through high school and toward the goals of obtaining a college degree, vocational credential and/or employment. Together, the three nonprofits are working to provide a coordinated, holistic continuum of care for opportunity youth in Hartford and serve as strong referral partners to and for other youth-serving organizations and systems in the region and state.

In 2018, the Foundation also 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 provided 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. CCA is part of the ecosystem of nonprofits working with Roca, COMPASS, and OPP to address the needs of opportunity youth in Hartford.

The Foundation also supports Senate Bill 387's expansion of the Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act to include pedestrian stops to provide additional data to prevent racial profiling by state and local law enforcement.

Having good data is essential, but data alone will not improve relations between law enforcement and youth in communities. Through our work we have learned that officers need additional training to support them in understanding stages of youth development and deescalating encounters with youth. We hope that the work of the Connecticut Institute for Youth and Police Relations can help inform approaches to reducing profiling youth of color.

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 (UNH) 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. UNH heard from several departments interested in participating. The goal of the program is to enhance education and training available to police officers—informed by community perspectives—to build the skills needed to balance the demands of public safety and the best interests of youth and communities of color. The program includes information on the impact of trauma on youth development, strategies for deescalating tense situations, and improving relationships. Those who go through the program **examine how racial biases can result in disparate treatment of youth** and others in communities of color and **works with officers to build their capacity** to assess difficult situations. The first class of 14 officers graduated in September 2021 and has begun implementing these strategies in their local departments in Hartford, West Hartford, East Hartford, Glastonbury, Bristol, Windsor, and the University of Connecticut.

The Foundation also supports the provision in Senate Bill 387 that expands the membership of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee to include four persons who are able to provide a voice for those living in communities of high juvenile arrest rates, including two of whom are under twenty-six years of age and have been impacted by the juvenile justice system. We also applaud the inclusion of parents and other community perspectives and support the bill's language to reimburse these new members for expenses incurred from participating in this group including transportation and childcare costs. It is important to recognize that people should have the support they need to fully participate in this vital work. The Foundation extends these accommodations in its own investments. Public policy can more fully address community issues when representatives who have lived experience are engaged in the process.



The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to improve community safety and to support our youth to give them the support they need to avoid involvement with the justice system and support justice involved youth so they can make a successful transition and thrive in their 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.