



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

Senate Bill 1, An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in School

House Bill 5465, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Educator Salaries and Expanding Child Care Opportunities for Families

Education Committee

March 21, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and distinguished members of the Education Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of Senate Bill 1, An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in School and House Bill 5465, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Educator Salaries and Expanding Child Care Opportunities for Families.**

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 achieve equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latinx communities, the Hartford Foundation supports addressing **basic human needs** in our region, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address food and housing, physical and mental health, and the digital divide.

The Foundation is pleased to see the bipartisan efforts of the General Assembly to expand access to mental health services for all Connecticut residents, especially children. The lack of access to adequate mental health services has been a concern for parents, caregivers, educators and healthcare providers for a very long time. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue as this public and economic health crisis has forced social isolation, disrupted routines, and created additional stress on families and children. We have seen the distressing results, including an increase in the numbers of children and teens experiencing depression and committing suicide. Far too often the only resource for families with a child experiencing behavioral health issues is to show up at the nearest hospital emergency department. Data from the Children's Hospital Association from 2020 reported a 24 percent increase in mental health emergency visits in children aged 5 to 11 and a 31 percent increase among children aged 12 to 17.

The Foundation has supported work around these issues at some of Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts. For example, [Windsor Public Schools](#) has been providing Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Justice Practices and Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) using a differentiated professional development model. Using a \$262,500 grant from the Foundation, the district's Office of Family and Community Partnerships supports wrap-around efforts as the district implements other



interventions through research and evidence-based strategies, including parent teacher home visits and a family resource center, which can include referrals for behavioral health services.

Through our investments in local Alliance Districts, the Foundation recognizes the vital role local school district's play in the lives of students beyond academics. This includes helping to ensure that all students, and sometimes even their families, have access to physical and behavioral health services. **For these reasons, the Hartford Foundation supports Senate Bill 1's provisions to increase funding to assess the needs for physical and mental health services in school districts and provide substantial resources to expand these vital health services to support our students.**

We applaud the inclusion of funds to provide school districts with grants to hire and retain additional school social workers and school psychologists. We also support the bill's allocation of funds to the Department of Public Health (DPH) to the 36 recommended sites for expanded mental health services contained in the final report of the School-Based Health Center Expansion Working Group. The Foundation also supports the allocation of funding to DPH to expand services of existing school-based health centers to provide mental health services. We also support the inclusion of resources to support the 15 existing school districts participating in the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) and expanding participation in the LEAP program to include five additional high-need districts. Several of the school districts we partner with have participated and benefited from this program.

The expansion of mental and physical health services will help ensure that young people and their families have access to the help they need in one location. We would encourage the legislature to take a close look at the funding mechanisms used to support this work to ensure that they are sustainable.

The Hartford Foundation also offers its support for House Bill 5465 which will provide support for existing school readiness and other state-funded preschool programs by increasing funding and program flexibility.

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 region facing barriers to employment. The Foundation's efforts focus on preparation, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and youth disconnected from school and work. This work includes 2Gen programs that take a family-centered approach and considers childcare and supports for both the parents and children, allowing parents to focus on their education and job training.

It is our goal to ensure that *all* children, especially those most vulnerable, have access to high quality early childhood experiences. Since 1987, the Foundation has invested more than \$40 million in early childhood development across the Greater Hartford area. The Foundation has supported early childhood policy, funding, and program quality, recognizing their importance in ensuring optimal safety and learning outcomes for children and pathways to economic security for their families and caregivers. As part of its COVID response efforts, the Foundation provided support to childcare providers, including assistance in applying for federal Paycheck Protection Program funds.



Hartford Foundation

FOR PUBLIC GIVING

Together for good.®

In January 2016, the Foundation launched the Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) that integrated education programs, support services, and career development to assist adult learners and expand their academic and job skill levels as a way of reaching self-sufficiency. CPI included an [extensive evaluation](#) of its

various programs and outlined some of the challenges and success of the initiative. One of the key findings was that childcare was the most frequent and costliest barrier to address. While several of the CPI programs included support for childcare, it ultimately remained a significant barrier to employment.

The Foundation also offers its support for House Bill 5465's proposal to provide additional childcare opportunities for Connecticut families by expanding the eligibility for the Care4Kids program.

Care4Kids is a critical program that ensures working parents can access safe, high-quality childcare. We encourage lawmakers to also ensure that parents pursuing education or training are also eligible for Care4Kids to support their efforts to increase their earning potential and help families exit poverty and reach greater self-sufficiency.

The Foundation also supports House Bill 5465's proposed expansion of the number of children in family childcare homes licensed by the Commissioner of Early Childhood. Home-based family childcare centers play a vital role in solving the dire shortage of childcare for infants and toddlers, care that is linguistically and culturally appropriate as well as available during nontraditional hours. Family childcare providers help to ensure the health and safety of many of our youngest children and provide access to affordable childcare to thousands of working families throughout the state.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to supporting those most in need during these historically challenging times. The Hartford Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to ensure that our children and families receive the support they need to thrive.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.