



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 471, An Act Concerning Elections and State Voting Rights**

**Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 25, 2022**

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony **in support of Senate Bill 471, An Act Concerning Elections and State Voting Rights.**

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. Over 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 supports **civic and resident engagement** in our region.

Supporting community voice and leadership is a priority for the Hartford Foundation, one that runs throughout each of our strategic priorities. We have awarded resources to support voting, participating in local government, volunteering, and sharing ideas on how public resources could be used to make our community a better place. Our grantmaking supports resident leadership and opportunities for resident-led collective action. The Foundation believes it is vital that policy decisions are informed by a diverse group of residents who are impacted by the actions at City Hall and the State Capitol. In prioritizing resources for this work, we hope to enhance inclusive opportunities for residents of our region to create positive change.

In 2018, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving launched its first nonpartisan voter registration initiative for Greater Hartford. Known as Get Out the Vote (GOTV), the objective was to reach out to populations who face systemic and structural barriers to voter participation in federal, state and local elections: young adults, Latinx and Black residents, justice-involved residents, individuals with developmental disabilities, and people living in high poverty neighborhoods. Thirteen community-based nonprofits successfully registered over 1,000 new voters and received 1,500 pledges to participate in the 2018 elections. Building off lessons learned from the 2018 effort, the following year the Hartford Foundation awarded 20 grants totaling \$448,400 over eighteen months to support voter engagement in 2019 and 2020 and activities to promote Census participation. This past summer, amidst COVID restriction requirements, the Foundation provided another five grants to support socially distanced census outreach and voter engagement activities.



The Foundation offers its **support of Senate Bill 471, An Act Concerning Elections and State Voting Rights** which includes detailed procedures and remedies to afford all citizens equal access to representation in our democracy. Modeled after Voting Rights Acts in California, Washington and Oregon and similar efforts underway in New York and Virginia, the Connecticut Voting Rights Act would expand voters' private rights against voter suppression, improve transparency, and assist election administrators. Senate Bill 471 would also expand language assistance to those for whom English is an obstacle to casting their ballots.

We applaud recent efforts by the legislature to expand qualified residents' access to voting including the proposed resolutions to create early voting and no-excuse absentee voting. Unfortunately, Connecticut residents continue to experience significant barriers to casting their ballot. The Center for Public Integrity observed that Connecticut voters still face some of the biggest obstacles outside of southern states. As we have seen in our most recent state and national elections, many urban communities—where the majority of Black and Latino voters reside—voters routinely encounter long lines and other obstacles on Election Day.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators and advocates to support efforts to ensure that all residents have a voice on critical issues and the solutions that are responsive to and beneficial for our entire community.

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.