



Hartford Foundation

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**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
House Bill 6319, An Act Concerning Efforts By the Department of Economic and Community Development to
Assist in the Recruitment of Persons or Persons Into Manufacturing Programs**

Commerce Committee

February 10, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Hartley, Representative Meskers, Senator Martin, Representative Harrison and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of House Bill 6319, An Act Concerning Efforts By the Department of Economic and Community Development to Assist in the Recruitment of Persons or Persons Into Manufacturing Programs.**

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 \$99 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 \$948 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 work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to **increase stable employment opportunities for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment.**

This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a sustaining wage. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing opportunities for education and training along with hiring and retaining residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work. **The Foundation asks the committee to consider expanding the provisions of House Bill 6319 to include recruiting opportunity youth, returning citizens and other residents facing significant barriers to employment to participate in manufacturing programs.**

Under the proposed language, House Bill 6319 would require the DECD to assist in efforts to increase the recruitment of eligible job seekers and high school students into manufacturing programs by promoting manufacturing careers to students at community colleges and high schools, creating programs for job seekers, holding career fairs or advertising on television, radio stations or by other digital means. **While the Foundation supports these efforts, it encourages the committee to expand the scope of this legislation to include untapped talent such as opportunity youth and men and women returning from incarceration. The Foundation also encourages the Committee to consider including additional funding to provide academic supports in programs to ensure that participants who need to build math or other literacy skills are successful.**

We see enormous gaps in reaching opportunity youth, returning citizens and other marginalized populations who aren't getting jobs, especially good jobs. Connecticut needs to strengthen career pathways programming to support people in building their academic and work readiness skills to access these opportunities.



Researchers confirm that the interplay of race, gender and the place where people grow up can have compounding effects on whether they disengage from school and work. This is a matter of racial equity. There is a critical need to support residents in building basic and professional skills while providing wraparound supports they need to be successful.

In Hartford, young men of color are disproportionately more likely to be disconnected from education and employment. To reverse this trend, the Hartford Foundation has partnered with City of Hartford, Dalio Education and a number of other nonprofit partners and key stakeholders to provide support for opportunity youth, defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in work.

The Foundation recently provided a grant to the [United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut](#) to support a [Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford](#) initiative that directly works with employers and partners including CCAT. This effort involves working with employers around job quality efforts to ensure that they are hiring opportunity youth, providing a competitive wage, with opportunities for career advancement.

One of the key partners in this effort is [Our Piece of the Pie](#) which recruits opportunity youth to participate in the [Hartford Youth Service Corps](#). Program participants engage in paid service learning projects and receive educational supports, job readiness training and personal development workshops.

Through its work in support of Hartford's Community Schools and six of our region's Alliance Districts (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Manchester, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks), the Foundation has seen how stronger school partnerships with families, nonprofits and the community help students feel increased connectedness to school, leading to increased attendance, academic engagement and persistence to graduation. We know that school districts are looking to engage in career pathways work starting in middle school and continuing through high school. Some of these school districts are interested in partnering with nonprofits to start exposing their students to vocation opportunities, which could include through after-school and summer enrichment programs. **The state should consider including support for partnerships that can provide early exposure to careers in advanced manufacturing.**

Research has demonstrated that people employed after release from incarceration are less likely to return to prison. Connecticut must be committed to ensuring access to education and workforce development programs for men and women while they are incarcerated and after release. They are essential strategies for preparing for employment and successful reentry.

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 include providing individuals with access to support services and referrals to additional programs to address healthcare and other basic needs. These programs could help prepare participants to enroll and be successful in advanced manufacturing training programs.

With thousands of Connecticut manufacturing job openings, the Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, philanthropy, nonprofits, advocates, and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment and ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce, reach their potential and economic stability, and to thrive and contribute to 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@hfp.org or 860-548-1888.