



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 1112, An Act Prohibiting Scholarship Displacement**

Senate Bill 1113, An Act Concerning Workforce Development Initiatives In The State

**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
January 30, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Martin, Representative Bronko, and distinguished members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of Senate Bill 1112, An Act Prohibiting Scholarship Displacement and Senate Bill 1113, An Act Concerning Workforce Development Initiatives In The State.**

Since 1925, the Hartford Foundation has proudly served as the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. This year, the foundation celebrates 100 years of service and remains committed to building an even greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, we have distributed more than \$100 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 \$1 billion since its founding in 1925.

As part of our strategic efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable economic and social mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation continues to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to increase stable employment and career opportunities for youth and adults in our region facing multiple barriers.

Our 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. November 2024 unemployment was three percent, yet labor participation was 64 percent. The low participation reflects the need to ensure we are engaging residents who have challenges in accessing and persisting in workforce training and job opportunities.

The foundation supports the intent of Senate Bill 1112 to ensure that Connecticut students who need financial aid receive all the resources available to them. Recognizing the value of postsecondary education and training to the economic mobility of middle- and low-income students, in 2024 the foundation awarded 440 scholarships totaling more than \$1.45 million. These scholarships were awarded through more than 100 funds created at the Hartford Foundation by individuals, families and organizations. The foundation has been awarding scholarships since 1945 and has seen first-hand the importance of students receiving adequate funds to attend college. For many students, especially those from low- and moderate-income families, whether they receive the financial aid needed directly affects the feasibility of attending four-year colleges. We know that a high percentage of older and first-generation students in Connecticut rely on receiving substantial support.



The foundation recognizes the need for wraparound services to support these students. In December 2021, the Foundation awarded a grant to Capital Community College to more fully serve its student body, by connecting students to its on-campus Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Center initiative. It is designed to help connect students to both internal and external support programs needed to persist and complete their studies and move on to gainful employment.

The foundation also provided a \$45,000 community organizing grant to the [Student Loan Fund](#) to support its work to develop leaders to help improve the systems of higher education funding and financing that disproportionately impact people of color and first-generation students. With an average debt of \$36,000, borrowers are struggling to build wealth, contribute fully to their families, and engage deeply with their communities. Student debt is a racial equity issue. Black women owe more than any other group.

The foundation applauds the proposal's effort to ensure that private and public investments in scholarship programs are used to complement rather than supplant college financial aid resources at Connecticut's higher education institutions. We have seen how the practice of scholarship displacement can threaten the availability of institutionally provided financial aid when students earn external scholarships. This practice often negates the benefit of those scholarships. By preventing colleges from reducing aid, this bill can help ensure that scholarships provide genuine additional financial support to students pursuing higher education.

The foundation also supports Senate Bill 1113, which directs the Board of Regents for Higher Education to conduct a comprehensive study on workforce development initiatives within the state. To ensure that public resources for workforce education and training are used effectively, it is vital that the state examine current workforce development strategies and identify areas for improvement, service gaps, and opportunities to fully align educational resources with employer as well as job seeker needs. The Foundation offers what we have learned in supporting workforce programs with public-private partners to inform this work.

Research confirms that the interplay of race, gender and where people grow up can have compounding effects on whether they disengage from school and work. It is a matter of racial equity. There is a critical need to support residents in building basic and professional skills while providing wraparound supports needed to be successful. In Connecticut, there are approximately 44,800 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 not in school or working. This represents more than ten percent of the young people in our state including 12.8 percent of all Connecticut Black youth, 10.3 percent of Latine youth, and nine percent of white youth. 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 the City of Hartford, Dalio Education, nonprofit partners, and other stakeholders to support opportunity youth. One key partner 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 community service learning projects and receive educational supports, job readiness training, and personal development workshops.

Recently, the Hartford Foundation also awarded a grant to [ReadyCT](#) whose work is focused on integrating career pathways and work-based learning opportunities within K-12 education, and partnering with schools and industries in Greater Hartford and across Connecticut. The organization has established business partnerships in Greater Hartford within the sectors that are integral to its program structure. These partnerships are critical to better aligning K-12 education and workforce systems. By connecting with high-demand fields like healthcare,



manufacturing, and information technology, ReadyCT helps students build essential skills and earn industry-recognized credentials, promoting economic mobility and meeting local workforce needs.

In 2023, the Foundation also awarded 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 the [Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology](#). This effort involves working with employers to promote job quality and ensure that they are hiring opportunity youth, providing a competitive wage, and opportunities for career advancement. **Developing strong relationships with employers willing to hire and retain graduates of workforce training programs is crucial to their success.**

The proposed study report could provide meaningful guidance to ensuring that workforce education programs align with existing and future job opportunities in Connecticut and provide adequate career orientations.

We recommend that this new effort build on other efforts to assess the workforce development landscape by the Office of Workforce Strategies and Connecticut research organizations that have studied the issue. Many organizations engaged in workforce development training programs have expressed a desire to take stock in what programs already exist in the state and address unmet needs.

October 2024 data indicated that there were 73,000 job openings in Connecticut. The Hartford 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 qualify for those job openings, reach their potential and economic stability, 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@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.