



Hartford Foundation

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**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on
House Bill 5278, An Act Concerning Incentives for Transit Oriented Development
Planning and Development Committee
February 28, 2024**

Good evening, Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, Senator Fazio, Representative Zullo and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 5278, An Act Concerning Incentives for Transit Oriented Development**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. Over 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 \$940 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latino residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to **increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods**. Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

The Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the numbers of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods both by increasing the opportunities in Hartford neighborhoods and by increasing the ability of Hartford residents to choose to move to other higher opportunity areas throughout the Greater Hartford region. In order to support these outcomes, the Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods. COVID has reinforced the need for all of us to live in safe, stable homes, in safe, stable neighborhoods, in safe, stable communities.

Connecticut is one of the most racially and economically segregated states in the country with 74 percent of Black residents and 68 percent of Latino residents living in census tracts assessed as low opportunity areas. The state has enabled municipalities to regulate certain land use through zoning. Exclusionary zoning practices have fostered this segregation for decades which has had devastating consequences on residents, communities, schools, and our state's economy.

We know that the vast majority of deed restricted affordable housing as well as naturally occurring affordable housing (such as multi-family homes and apartment buildings) are concentrated in urban areas such as Hartford. This segregation results in concentration of poverty, primarily impacting Black and Latinx residents. The Hartford Foundation offers its support for efforts to generate diverse housing, including more affordable housing, in higher opportunity areas throughout the state, providing people with more choices about where they wish to live.

In its effort to make affordable, stable, and higher quality housing more accessible to low-income residents of color and residents encountering housing barriers, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving offered a competitive grant opportunity focused on supporting housing policy and advocacy activities. This work included a grant to the [Center for Latino Progress](#) and its Transport Hartford Academy to advocate for Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) at the municipal, regional, and statewide level. This work focuses on advocating for the inclusion of Transit Oriented Development in the Affordable Housing Plans of West Hartford, Newington, and Windsor. It also includes feedback from



residents in the Parkville section of Hartford about their housing needs and from stakeholders involved in the redevelopment of this neighborhood.

The Foundation also provided grants to [Desegregate CT's](#) advocacy and organizing efforts to support its Work Live Ride transit-oriented communities initiative, reduce minimum lot size requirements, and streamline zoning bureaucracy.

The Hartford Foundation applauds House Bill 5278, An Act Concerning Incentives for Transit Oriented Development efforts to support the development of housing by allowing towns to opt-in to create a Transit-Oriented Community (TOC) if they have bus or train service designed by their planning and wetlands commissions. The approval of a TOC could create a mixed-use, mixed-income special district near a train or bus station. In doing so, municipalities would receive prioritization for state funding and technical assistance from the newly funded Office of Responsible Growth to build the necessary infrastructure.

This bill would not only help to provide easier access to public transportation but also would create the density necessary to make it economically viable to construct quality, affordable housing for low- and middle-income Connecticut residents. As the state has received an unprecedented infusion of federal infrastructure funding for public transportation, this timely proposal would help more Connecticut residents have access to mass transit options. Transit oriented development directly benefits workers and families who rely on public transit as well as the many employers looking for reliable workers. In addition, municipalities benefit from increased property tax revenues and grand list growth from new construction.

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Many Greater Hartford residents lack adequate access to transportation. According to the [Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing Index 2023](#), the rate of transportation insecurity was 21 percent for those who did not attend college and 32 percent for adults making less than \$30,000 per year. According to Census data, vehicle availability varies by race and ethnicity and by the number of workers in the home. Among households with at least one working-age member but without any employed members, 59 percent of Black households and 52 percent of Latine households had no access to a vehicle. Only 21 percent of white households in this group lacked vehicle access. In households with one employed adult, 18 percent of Black households lacked vehicle access and 17 percent of Latine households lacked access to a vehicle. This compared to three percent of white households with one employed adult lacking vehicle access. In many parts of Greater Hartford, having access to a vehicle is needed to find and keep a job. Racial disparities in access to a vehicle or other transportation options can exacerbate racial disparities in employment opportunities and income levels.

We have seen how restrictive zoning serves as a barrier to residents trying to access public transit. Incentivizing communities to create housing opportunities near transit is a crucial step in the ongoing efforts to reform Connecticut's antiquated and discriminatory approach to zoning, which has deprived our state of much-needed housing development and growth that has had a devastating impact on equity and economic vitality.

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods.



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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.