

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on
Senate Bill 6, An Act Concerning Housing
Housing Committee
March 5, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Felipe, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 6, An Act Concerning Housing.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$998 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our commitment is to work with community partners to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latine communities, the Hartford Foundation supports basic human needs, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address access to emergency shelter and homelessness diversion, healthy food choices, physical and mental health, and the digital divide. We also invest in ensuring adequate job training that leads to quality jobs.

Closely related to our work to ensure adequate safety nets and pathways to good jobs are our efforts to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods in Hartford and other towns in the region by working with nonprofit, government, and other community partners. Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, high performing schools, low crime, green space, and greater availability of quality, affordable housing. Given these issues, **we urge legislators to support immediate interventions as well as to examine systemic challenges that are driving housing instability in Connecticut.**

The Hartford Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported this work for many years.

The Hartford Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in Greater Hartford; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide HOMEConnecticut Campaign. Its mission is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in an equitable community of their choice. The partners of HOMEConnecticut recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve.

Housing costs continue to increase at a dramatic rate. [Statewide, rents have increased by 24 percent since 2017](#). More than 114,000 renter households spend [more than half of their income](#) on housing costs, well beyond the affordable target of 30 percent. After receiving a Section 8 housing voucher, many families struggle to find an available home in the location they want. The Foundation supports **Senate Bill's inclusion of a \$25 million increase for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) for the coming fiscal year.**

This increase will allow the program to keep pace with rent increases for families being served currently and expand rental assistance to reach many additional low-income families.



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Prior to COVID, Connecticut had made tremendous strides in reducing homelessness, due in large part to the hard work and dedication of the nonprofit providers working directly with housing insecure residents. Unfortunately, the pandemic reversed this progress. **With increased workloads, historic underfunding, and greater competition to hire and retain staff, the need to increase funding for our homeless prevention system has never been greater.**

The Foundation remains committed to preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford by both providing grants to organizations supporting people experiencing homelessness and by addressing systemic barriers to quality, affordable housing.

For many years the Foundation has awarded approximately \$1 million annually to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and landlord negotiation, and other services to residents at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. Today, our portfolio includes annual emergency assistance grants to smaller neighborhood organizations providing urgent food, clothing, financial assistance (e.g., for rent and utility expenses) and domestic violence aftercare. In 2021, the Foundation began modifying its approach for supporting homeless service providers to offering flexible multi-year core support grants, helping service providers to plan for longer-term initiatives and hire staff with greater confidence.

The Hartford Foundation has supported the **Greater Hartford [Coordinated Access Network](#)**, which ensures coordination among homelessness and housing nonprofits and groups, since its inception. In 2021, the Foundation provided a grant to the **[Connecticut Coalition to End Homeless](#)** to support the development of a statewide plan to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. This plan is a re-envisioning of the Reaching Home Campaign with the goal of ending homelessness in the state by integrating a racial equity and inclusion approach to the Connecticut Coordinated Access Network's response to homelessness.

The Foundation also provided a grant to the **[Connecticut Bar Association](#)** to support the evaluation of the Right to Counsel pilot program which formally launched in January of 2022. Organizations providing direct legal services under the program include Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Veterans Legal Services, and Greater Hartford Legal Aid.

Feedback from our grantees and the most recent data available reflect a need to double-down on homelessness prevention and diversion:

- Based on the January 2023 Point in Time Count, 3,015 people were experiencing homelessness, compared to 2,930 people in January 2022. That is close to a three percent increase. For eight years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Connecticut had been declining.
- Research confirms that structural racism disproportionately exposes people of color to poverty, housing and employment discrimination, incarceration, and health disparities, creating unique barriers to stable housing. Of the 3,015 Connecticut residents who experienced homelessness in 2023, 28 percent were Black/African American (while Black/African Americans only make up 10.5 percent of the state's population).
- According to the **[Connecticut Fair Housing Center](#)** and **[CT Data Collaborative](#)** report, "**[Exposing Connecticut's Eviction Crisis: Understanding the Intersection of Race and Sex in Connecticut's Eviction Crisis](#)**," between January 1, 2017, and December 31, 2021, Connecticut landlords filed a total of 75,429 eviction cases, with Black and Latino renters being evicted at the highest rates.
- Black renters were over three times more likely than white renters to face eviction, and Latino renters were over two times more likely than white renters to face eviction.



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- Eviction cases were disproportionately filed against women (56%), and even more disproportionately against Black and Latina women (62% and 59%, respectively).
- Tenants without legal representation were nearly twice as likely to have a removal order issued against them.

The Hartford Foundation also offers its support for Senate Bill's proposal to invest \$20 million to stabilize and strengthen Connecticut's Homeless Response System. This amount mirrors the proposal of the [Connecticut CAN End Homelessness](#) coalition which includes:

- **\$5 million annualizing Cold Weather Emergency Response Program Funding** to keep Connecticut residents from freezing outside.
- **\$6 million to DOH and \$1.4 million to DMHAS annually to strengthen shelter and outreach capacity** to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for necessary staffing and operational costs.
- **\$3.6 million to increase and annualize funding for Diversion and CAN Hubs** to continue to increase diversion rates and for CAN hubs to connect people with critical support and resources to resolve their housing crisis.
- **\$2 million to increase and annualize funding for the Coordinated Access Network (CAN) Backbone Agencies** to prevent system interruptions and maximize performance of the agencies that lead the emergency Homeless Response System and effectively organize the system of care.
- **\$2 million to annualize Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool** to help individuals, families, and youth overcome financial barriers.

The Foundation also offers its support for **the proposal's inclusion of protections for Connecticut's renters, including eviction for cause.** This represents the expansion of existing Connecticut law which currently protects some renters from no-fault evictions, including people who are 62 years or older with certain disabilities in buildings with five or more units, and federally subsidized or public housing.

Unfortunately, most Connecticut renters have no protection against no-fault evictions. People can be removed from their homes with no legal recourse despite paying rent on time and otherwise being a good tenant. Tenants with month-to-month leases can be evicted with only a 30-day notice, leaving little time to find replacement housing. This past October, the Hartford Foundation provided grants to the [Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Inc.](#) and the [Connecticut Tenants Union](#) to support their efforts to expand "good cause" eviction protections for tenants.

We know that evictions can have traumatic and lasting effects on families. Evictions often perpetuate housing insecurity, increase homelessness, and make communities less stable, cohesive, and safe. People of color, families with young children, and renters with disabilities are often the target of no-fault evictions. Connecticut's Black and Latine renters are two to three times more likely to be evicted than white renters. Tenants who advocate on their own behalf or support their neighbors by requesting repairs, reporting unsafe housing conditions, or contesting rent increases may be retaliated against through no-fault evictions.

By expanding just cause protections, Connecticut can empower tenants to assert their right to safe, stable housing. These protections will also help to reduce housing discrimination by requiring justification for evictions, balancing the rights of tenants and landlords. Landlords would still be permitted to evict tenants in cases of nonpayment of rent, violating the lease, or refusing to agree to a reasonable rent increase. **By limiting these protections to tenants in buildings with five or more units, small landlords of owner-occupied buildings would not be impacted.**



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The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, philanthropy, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that will ensure all Connecticut residents have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

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.