



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
House Bill 6692, An Act Concerning Certain Arts, Culture and Tourism Grants**

**Commerce Committee
February 23, 2023**

Good afternoon, Senator Hartley, Representative Currey, Senator Martin, Representative Buckbee and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to testify **in support of House Bill 6692, An Act Concerning Certain Arts, Culture and Tourism Grants, which provides new state supported investment in Connecticut's arts, culture, and tourism sectors.**

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 \$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 the Hartford Foundation's efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports arts and culture in our region, with a focus on increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of Greater Hartford's arts workforce.

The arts are a critical asset in our state and, when properly utilized, can support community and resident well-being, including physical and mental health, learning, economic growth and community cohesion. The arts provided an invaluable source of hope and healing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in times of crisis, many funders and the state must prioritize Basic Human Needs and the nonprofits that provide them. As we move from crisis to recovery and ongoing resilience, we should consider public support for the arts as part of that recovery plan.

Our Arts and Culture grantmaking and other activities are informed by [the 2019 Greater Hartford Arts Landscape Study](#), commissioned by the Hartford Foundation and the Connecticut Office of the Arts. The study found a sector challenged by financial fragility and a need to address issues of equity, diversity and inclusion related to access, program content, workforce and leadership.

The Foundation prioritizes and supports increased equity and inclusion in the Greater Hartford arts sector. To inform our commitment, in 2019 the Hartford Foundation formed *Artists of Color Unite!* (AOCU), an advisory group comprised of local artists of color. The group recommended support to arts projects, capacity building and COVID-19 relief. AOCU also recommended a grant to support Artists of Color Accelerate, a program that created fellowships for ten artists with ten local arts organizations that will host them to develop artistic ventures of community significance while our community recovers from COVID.

In 2021, the advisory group recommended support for the Independent Arts Fund regranting program that funded 36 art projects in visual arts, theater, podcasts, dance, video, fashion, music and publishing. In 2022, the Foundation continued its support of the Independent Arts Fund and the Artists of Color Accelerate program.

Our region is fortunate to be the home of the [Greater Hartford Arts Council \(GHAC\)](#) which works to ensure our region is a thriving multi-cultural destination anchored by a diverse and innovative arts sector.



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The Foundation seeks to increase investment in the social strength of Hartford neighborhoods as well as increase the stability, growth, and number of Black- and Latinx-owned small businesses. The arts have served as a tool to pursue both of these outcomes. In 2022, the Foundation partnered with the City of Hartford and 224 EcoSpace to launch DominGO! open streets initiative, activating public spaces and increasing traffic to local Hartford businesses.

The Love Your Block project is a component of Love Hartford, a program in which the City partners with residents in support of initiatives that can improve the quality of life for all. According to the National League of Cities: *Reimagining public spaces supports local entrepreneurs' opportunities and longevity. Public spaces, particularly main street corridors, serve significant roles in entrepreneurs' ability to launch, grow and sustain businesses.* Many of the community projects supported by Love Your Block focus on bringing art by local artists into neighborhoods. The Foundation has expanded its support of Love Your Block with a three-year commitment to the program.

While philanthropic dollars are more flexible, we have seen how COVID has created competing needs between basic human services and the arts. This reinforces the need for the public sector to be the first and primary funder for both arts and basic human needs.

House Bill 6692 would direct the Department of Economic and Community Development to provide grants or loans to support state-wide marketing, infrastructure or workforce development and require DECD to create processes to identify strategic goals, metrics and accountability structures for this investment. The Foundation encourages DECD to work to ensure that the development and implementation of strategic goals include collaboration and input from organizations and individuals representing under resourced artists of color.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and the business sector to support arts and culture in our state and create a stronger infrastructure to ensure the arts sector's stability and resilience and increase the racial/ethnic diversity of Connecticut's arts workforce.

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.