



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on
House Bill 6890, An Act Concerning Qualified Transit Communities
Planning and Development Committee
March 15, 2023**

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 House Bill 6890, An Act Concerning Qualified Transit Communities.**

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.

While the Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have and will continue to support this work, the state must lead the effort to ensure that every Connecticut resident can have access to an affordable home in a high opportunity neighborhood. Public commitment must also address the interplay of basic human needs, including housing, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations delivering these services.

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 6890, An Act Concerning Qualified Transit Communities' comprehensive approach to provide financial incentives for municipalities to adopt transit-oriented development policies.** This initiative could be a catalyst for encouraging municipalities to offer a wide array of housing choices, creating communities where diverse groups of people can find an affordable and stable place to live.

Many Connecticut towns lack moderately priced housing options near transportation centers. Reliable, regular transit service is a critical asset for lower income families, and their access to it will be preserved and expanded under the Work Live Ride Act.

This legislation allows cities and towns' planning and zoning bodies the opportunity to opt-in to developing a Transit Oriented Community District along a rail or bus route. In doing so, a municipality becomes eligible for state assistance and funding from the newly created Office of Responsible Growth to support planning and design, infrastructure upgrades and expansion, and for actual home construction.

Towns that create a Transit Oriented Community District would develop basic guidelines and best practices including developing multi-family housing touching a half mile to at least one public transit station, home/acre requirements based on population and existing transit infrastructure, affordability level requirements based on local market conditions, allow mixed use, mixed income development "as of right," and allow for small lots sizes with no minimum parking requirements.

Unlike some transit-oriented development proposals, House Bill 6890 is not a one-size-fits-all proposal and 163 towns and cities are eligible to create a Transit Oriented Community under three different categories including a *Rapid Transit Community*, a town or city with at least one rail/rapid bus route that could accommodate 20-30 homes per acre; *Transit Community*, a town or city with at least one regular local bus route that could accommodate 15-20 homes per acre; and *Transit Adjacent Community*, a town or city bordering a rapid transit or local bus route that could accommodate 10 homes per acre.

This bill would not only help to provide easier access to public transportation but also create the density necessary to make it economically viable to construct quality, affordable housing for low and middle-income residents. As the state is receiving an unprecedented infusion of federal infrastructure funding for public transportation, this timely proposal will ensure that more Connecticut residents have access to mass transit options.

Transit oriented development provides significant benefits to workers who rely on public transit and the employers who need them. In addition, municipalities benefit from increased property tax revenues and grand list growth from new construction.

We have seen how restrictive zoning serves as a barrier to residents trying to access public transit. Creating more housing opportunities near transit – at no public cost – 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.

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.