



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony

House Bill 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing

Housing Committee

March 10, 2022

Good evening, Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta 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 House Bill 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets, over the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$97 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 \$894 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 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 communities. 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. Hartford residents that wish to move to neighboring communities do not often get that choice.

In 2019 the Hartford Foundation provided a grant to support residents in Clay Arsenal Apartments, Barber Gardens, and Infill in Hartford, who wanted to move to areas of opportunity. All three complexes had their contracts with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development terminated due to conditions that threatened residents' health and



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safety. The Foundation awarded grants to the Center for Leadership and Justice and Open Communities Alliance who worked with tenants to provide leadership training, legal assistance, and technical advice to navigate the complex housing situation and relocation process. Of the 150 Clay Arsenal families who were relocated, 61 percent wanted to move to Hartford suburbs such as West Hartford, Glastonbury, and Windsor. However, the timing of the relocation process and lack of affordable housing options in communities outside of Hartford meant that most families had to relocate to housing in the same, or similar, neighborhoods.

This year, the Foundation provided a \$25,000 grant to support the Open Communities Alliance's creation and development of the Growing Together Connecticut coalition. This group is working to generate more housing choices throughout Connecticut and promote equitable revitalization of under-resourced communities. The effort focuses on Fair Share Planning and Zoning that positions each town in the state to lay the groundwork for positive housing growth that is responsive to the long-term needs of Connecticut. In addition, Growing Together Connecticut calls for equitable reinvestments--especially in cities—to ensure that every community in the state can reach its full potential.

The Hartford Foundation supports **House Bill 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing** which would require an assessment of the statewide need for affordable housing and an allocation of such need to planning regions and municipalities; the creation of affordable housing plans for each municipality; and produce a study on municipalities' performance in meeting the requirements of these plans.

Modeled after a successful New Jersey law, this proposal seeks to analyze the state's actual affordable housing needs and then develop a shared plan with shared responsibilities to meet that need. The bill would require the state, in consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders, to develop technical assistance for municipalities as well as incentives and enforcement measures.

It is projected that the passage and successful implementation of Fair Share Planning and Zoning could create approximately 300,000 units of market rate and affordable housing over ten years to address our Connecticut's crucial housing needs. This proposal would allow towns to develop their own plans and zone for growth by removing political barriers and help to ensure that all our residents have the ability to live in quality, affordable housing in high opportunity neighborhoods. Fair Share Planning and Zoning will create more integrated, vibrant communities and make our state an even better place to live and raise a family.

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 and have their voices heard by policymakers.

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.