



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 151, An Act Establishing a Full Employment Trust Fund
Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 23, 2023**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of Senate Bill 151, An Act Establishing a Full Employment Trust Fund.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$99 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region over the past two years. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$948 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to **increase stable employment opportunities for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment.**

This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a sustaining wage. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing opportunities for education and training along with hiring and retaining residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

For these reasons, the Foundation offers its support for [Senate Bill 151, An Act Establishing a Full Employment Trust Fund](#) which would create a full employment trust fund to be administered by the Labor Department in order to support employment opportunity grants for public and nonprofit entities to create employment opportunities and job-training programs. The Foundation applauds the bill's provisions that would allow the fund to support workforce housing, employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth, and the expansion of work-study opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students. The Foundation offers what we have learned in supporting workforce programs with public-private partners to inform approaches to administering the Fund to realize "full employment" for all residents.

Researchers confirm that the interplay of race, gender and where people grow up can have compounding effects on whether they disengage from school and work. This is a matter of racial equity. There is a critical need to support residents in building basic and professional skills while providing wraparound supports they need to be successful.

In Hartford, young men of color are disproportionately more likely to be disconnected from education and employment. To reverse this trend, the Hartford Foundation has partnered with City of Hartford, Dalio Education and other nonprofit partners and key stakeholders to support opportunity youth, defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in work.

One of the key partners in this initiative is [Our Piece of the Pie](#) which recruits opportunity youth to participate in the [Hartford Youth Service Corps](#). Program participants engage in paid service learning projects and receive educational supports, job readiness training and personal development workshops.



The Foundation recently provided a grant to the [United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut](#) to support a [Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford](#) initiative that works directly with employers and other partners, including Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology. This effort involves working with employers to ensure that they are hiring opportunity youth, providing a competitive wage, and offering opportunities for career advancement.

Through its work in support of Hartford's Community Schools and six of our region's Alliance Districts (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Manchester, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks), the Foundation has seen how stronger partnerships between schools, families, nonprofits and the community help students feel increased connectedness to their school, leading to increased attendance, academic engagement and persistence to graduation. We know that school districts are looking to engage in career pathways work starting in middle school and continuing through high school. Some districts are interested in partnering with nonprofits to start exposing their students to vocational opportunities, which could include after-school and summer enrichment programs. **This new fund could help to support such partnerships between schools and nonprofit organizations.**

The Foundation encourages the Department of Labor to complement programming already in place to provide more opportunities for students to get meaningful, hands-on work experience while in school that fully exposes them to careers and develops job readiness skills. Plans need to support access to transportation and accommodate school schedules.

Research has demonstrated that people employed after release from incarceration are less likely to return to prison. **Connecticut must be committed to ensuring access to education and workforce development programs for men and women while they are incarcerated and after release.** These are essential strategies for preparing for employment and successful reentry.

The Foundation has funded such critical reentry supports, including preemployment training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford and the BEST Chance Program. Today, these programs provide access to a range of support services; they could also help participants to enroll and be successful in a range of job readiness, academic support, and professional skills training programs.

The Foundation applauds Senate Bill 151's inclusion of workforce housing options. For many individuals looking for employment, particularly people returning from incarceration, the lack of access to affordable, safe, stable housing is often their greatest challenge. As reported in the recently released [State of Reentry Report](#), of those individuals incarcerated with an end of sentence date within six months, 22 percent reported no housing option upon release. The state's Reentry Welcome Centers have found significant housing instability. [Evaluations](#) of the Hartford Reentry Welcome Center, which the Hartford Foundation helps to fund, have consistently found a high percentage of its clients experiencing homelessness. **Any state resources that can be dedicated to providing housing for low-income people seeking work would help to address layers of housing challenges and bring attention to what more is needed.**

It is important that this new fund have sufficient and stable resources to cover a variety of costs, including stipends to cover immediate expenses and promote participation, wraparound services (including job retention case management), and evaluation.

Many state and other funding opportunities do not ensure equitable access by smaller, neighborhood-based nonprofit organizations. The Foundation has been working to support these organizations having access to our funding as well as state funding opportunities. We would encourage the Department of Labor to work collaboratively with philanthropy to support work such as mutual participation information sessions about grant opportunities and technical assistance for grant writing to get dollars into local communities.



With thousands of Connecticut job openings, the Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, philanthropy, nonprofits, advocates, and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment and ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce, reach their potential and economic stability, and to thrive and contribute to Connecticut's economy.

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.