



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on

House Bill 6938, An Act Increasing The Number Of Rental Assistance Program Certificates.

House Bill 6890, An Act Concerning The Rental Assistance Program.

House Bill 6889, An Act Concerning Evictions For Cause.

House Bill 6939, An Act Authorizing State Funding For The Right To Counsel Program.

House Bill 6948, An Act Concerning The Collateral Consequences Of Criminal Records On Housing Opportunities.

House Bill 6941, An Act Exempting The Income Earned By A Child Of An Applicant From The Calculation Of Gross Income In Consideration For Participation In The Rental Assistance Program.

Senate Bill 1303, An Act Concerning Nonresident Landlord Registration And Increasing Penalties For Repeat Building And Fire Code Violations.

Senate Bill 1264, An Act Requiring A Notification Of Rights To Parties Before A Fair Rent Commission.

Housing Committee

February 18, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Marx, 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 testimony on House Bills 6938, 6890, 6889, 6939, 6948, 6941, and Senate Bills 1303 and 1264. These bills reflect a commitment among many legislators to address the urgent need to increase housing opportunities, especially for low- and moderate-income residents, and to ensure meaningful safeguards to protect housing quality and compliance with local housing regulations.

Since 1925, the Hartford Foundation has proudly served as the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. This year, the foundation celebrates 100 years of service and remains committed to building an even greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, we have distributed more than \$100 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 \$1 billion since its founding.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latine communities, the Hartford Foundation supports basic human needs in our region, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address access to housing, food, physical and mental health, and the digital divide. Many of the foundation's past and



current grants focus on preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford. The Hartford Foundation has supported the work of housing providers for many years. We know that programs with public-private funding are better able to address the layers of need and sustain the work. **Adequate public support is essential** if we are to address the interrelated needs that data show are prevalent in communities of color, youth, and adult reentry populations. No single entity can meet the enormous need alone. It requires strong partnerships.

Through our grantmaking and listening to community residents, the Hartford Foundation has seen and heard how essential access to basic human needs is throughout the Greater Hartford region in meeting the immediate challenges of residents. Our investments have shown that ensuring people's access to these basic needs is essential to rebuilding their lives and achieving self-sufficiency.

Each year, the Foundation awards approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, warming centers, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and other services to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In 2021, the foundation began more fully supporting the mission of homelessness and other service providers by offering multiyear core support, as well as project grants, including two modest annual grants to proximate organizations providing urgent food, clothing, and financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses).

As critical is our support of work to address systemic barriers to quality, stable, affordable housing, including the [Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network](#) and the policy agenda of [CT CAN End Homelessness](#).

The foundation also 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 the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

This work includes supporting efforts to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods by working with nonprofit, government, and other community partners.

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. These are qualities many of us look for in choosing a place to live. Given these interrelated issues, we urge legislators to support immediate interventions as well as to examine systemic challenges that are driving housing instability in Connecticut.

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

According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing 2023 Index](#), rising housing costs have exacerbated poverty: About a third of households are spending more than 30 percent of their



income on housing. Forty-nine percent of renters are burdened by housing costs, with higher shares among Black (55 percent) and Latino (54 percent) renters.

[Statewide, rents have increased by 24 percent since 2017.](#) More than 120,000 renter households spend [more than half of their income](#) on housing costs, well beyond the affordable target for housing costs of 30 percent of household income. After receiving a Section 8 housing voucher, many families then struggle to find an affordable housing in the location they want.

We know that Connecticut currently has a gap of more than 92,000 affordable homes, with a significant need among households earning below 30 percent of the Area Medium Income (AMI). It is estimated that there are only 34 homes for every 100 households at this lower AMI, leaving more than 70 percent with an affordable place to live.

The foundation supports **House Bill 6938, An Act Increasing The Number Of Rental Assistance Program Certificates** which calls for more financial resources to help low-income households access rental assistance. **We urge legislators to support HOMEConnecticut's proposal to increase funding for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) by \$20 million each year of the biennial budget. This includes \$11.5 million each year to keep pace with rent increases for existing families being served and \$8.5 million each year to expand rental assistance to reach 650 more low-income families.**

The foundation also supports the efforts of **House Bill 6890, An Act Concerning The Rental Assistance Program** to modify Connecticut's rental assistance program to improve its effectiveness and accessibility. Specifically, the foundation supports the legislation's proposed increase in the duration of rental assistance certificates, allowing them to be valid for one year and potentially extended by an additional 180 days upon good cause. We also support the bill's efforts to streamline the unit inspection process and expedite inspections. The number of inspection units that can be reasonably accommodated should be fully explored to be sure the requirement can be met and the proposal's intent to address housing deficits more quickly can be achieved. The foundation acknowledges that staff limitations may require changes to the specifics of the timing of inspections, but the effort to streamline the process would be beneficial to both the voucher holder and property owners.

The foundation also supports the legislation's efforts to create more flexibility by allowing housing unit owners to self-certify unit eligibility and permitting tenants to occupy units pending inspection. This allows for people to have earlier access to housing which can be incredibly helpful to both tenants and property owners. The foundation also supports the bill's call that program payments to landlords occur within ten days of a qualifying tenancy's start. The foundation also supports the legislation's effort to have the Housing Commissioner establish methods for electronic signature and submission of program documents, which will modernize the application and approval processes.

The Hartford Foundation supports **House Bill 6889, An Act Concerning Evictions For Cause** which seeks to expand existing Connecticut law that 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. Currently most Connecticut renters, including those in mobile homes, 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. The Hartford Foundation has 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 also will 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.

The Hartford Foundation also supports **House Bill 6939, An Act Authorizing State Funding For The Right To Counsel Program**. The foundation provided a grant to the [Connecticut Bar Association](#) to support the evaluation of the Right to Counsel pilot program which formally launched in January 2022.

According to their report:

- From January 2022 to November 2024, Connecticut saved about \$36.6 million it would have otherwise spent on emergency shelter services, foster care placements, and Medicaid spending, among other social services.
- The right to counsel program has offered legal aid to nearly 5,500 households, representing close to 13,000 individuals, many of them children.
- The percentage of tenants who had legal representation in areas served by the right to counsel program has nearly tripled since the program started, from around 7 percent to 18 percent.

While providing low-income tenants with access to an attorney will not guarantee they can stay in their homes, it has prevented having an eviction on one’s record, something that makes it difficult to find a new place to live. Having access to legal counsel can also extend the amount of time people have to leave their current homes, allowing them more time to find somewhere else to live and maintain some level of stability and continuity for families.

The Hartford Foundation also offers its support for **House Bill 6948, An Act Concerning The Collateral Consequences Of Criminal Records On Housing Opportunities**. Most people in Connecticut prisons eventually return to their communities and need access to basic supports to effectively reintegrate into the community, especially stable housing. Without access to stable, secure housing, people who have



returned home from incarceration often find it difficult to secure and maintain employment, receive mail, and meet other basic needs for themselves and their families.

Since 2007, the Hartford Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed. This has included support for the [Reentry Welcome Center](#) in Hartford led by Community Partners in Action, with additional funding from the City of Hartford and other state and federal resources and working with a broad referral network of service providers. Since 2015, the Foundation also has been supporting the [BEST Chance](#) reentry program coordinated by Capital Workforce Partners, with support from the Connecticut Department of Labor and other funding, and a network of training and other providers. Both programs provide returning citizens with access to basic services and referrals to community-based food, shelter, health, and other programs.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced important lessons:

- Housing is an essential resource, without which most people will struggle to make a successful transition to the community.
- The stigma facing returning citizens who seek housing, employment, and successful reentry into the community can undermine their progress in making the transition .
- Individuals can become contributing members to their families and community, and their success should be recognized and rewarded.

The [2024 State of Reentry \(SOR\) Report](#), commissioned by Career Resources Inc. in collaboration with reentry centers and other leaders, highlights the barriers people face upon their release. The report continued to document that Black/African Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans are disproportionately represented within Connecticut's prison and jails relative to their population size in Connecticut, which underscores the need to address racial discrimination in access to housing opportunities.

Department of Correction data in the report indicated that 16 percent of people in the study reported immediate housing instability. Reentry welcome center providers in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury reported higher housing insecurity. This is the third consecutive year that the annual State of Reentry study documented persistent challenges related to housing insecurity.

The Hartford Foundation **appreciates the provisions included in 6948 that seek to limit how housing providers can use criminal records when evaluating potential tenants in order to promote fair housing opportunities for individuals with past criminal convictions.** We welcome the work to consider developing a comprehensive framework that restricts housing providers from inquiring about criminal history before making a conditional offer of housing. We understand the potential need for further discussion on specific guidelines related to how criminal records can be considered to sets reasonable limitations for considering past convictions and creating time-based restrictions for less serious crimes. We support the bill's requirement that housing providers provide written notice before withdrawing a conditional offer, to allow applicants an opportunity to provide mitigating evidence about their criminal history and consider factors like rehabilitation and good conduct. The foundation also supports the bill's



creation of training, model forms, and guidance developed by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

The foundation offers its support for **House Bill 6941, An Act Exempting The Income Earned By A Child Of An Applicant From The Calculation Of Gross Income In Consideration For Participation In The Rental Assistance Program.**

The Foundation has been a long-time supporter of efforts to provide our youth with career readiness development and paid work opportunities. This includes the Foundation's work with Capital Workforce Partners (CWP), other local nonprofits, and the City of Hartford Connecticut Department of Labor and other funding partners to provide hundreds of youth in Hartford and the Capital Region workforce development and job experiences through the [Summer Youth Employment Learning Program \(SYELP\)](#). The Hartford Foundation also provides support to the [Hartford Youth Service Corps](#) and its lead agency, Our Piece of the Pie (OPP).

These programs provide hundreds of Greater Hartford youth with an invaluable, real-world opportunity to learn what it takes to hold a job and what is expected in the workplace. Perhaps just as important, these programs allow youth to have their own income to assist themselves and their families. Yet, these modest earnings should not be used to prevent low- and moderate-income families from qualifying for rental assistance.

House Bill 6941 would ensure that youth seeking to benefit from these early job opportunities to better prepare them for the workforce do not hinder their families' ability to access state rental assistance. The foundation supports the proposed changes to Connecticut's rental assistance program by including an income exemption for income earned by children who live with a parent or guardian who is a rental assistance applicant. This exemption would end when a child turns 26. At a time when the state is seeking to better engage youth in work and school and families are struggling to obtain housing, this proposal is a thoughtful effort to support both of these goals.

The foundation also supports the intent of **Senate Bill 1303, An Act Concerning Nonresident Landlord Registration And Increasing Penalties For Repeat Building And Fire Code Violations.** It presents a thoughtful approach for identifying property owners and ensuring that they are held accountable when they fail to maintain clean and safe housing to their tenants. This bill would apply to municipalities with 25,000 or more residents, non-resident property owners, project-based housing providers, and their agents. The foundation supports the bill's requirement that these parties register detailed identifying information, with the local tax assessor and that this information be updated in a timely manner. Far too often, absentee property owners' contact information is not available, making it challenging for tenants and local officials to reach them when problems arise that need to be addressed. The foundation also support the bill's call for increasing penalties for building and fire code violations, specifically by introducing escalating fines for repeat offenders.

The foundation asks legislators and municipal officials to work with tenant rights groups to best inform implementation of housing inspection programs to avoid or mitigate unintended consequences. The Hartford Foundation has a long commitment to supporting safe housing by supporting organizations



including [Connecticut Fair Housing Center](#), [Center for Leadership and Justice](#), [Open Communities Alliance](#), and the [Connecticut Tenants Union](#). These organizations have assisted tenants by bringing code enforcement actions, advocating for repairs, working with municipal leaders to enforce housing codes, and obtaining reparations for tenants living in poor conditions.

In Hartford, approximately 85 percent of housing was built before 1980 and 60 percent before 1960. Aging housing often has inefficient heat retention, potentially toxic materials such as asbestos and lead paint, and structural issues that leave housing frequently unsafe/unsound. In 2021, the foundation provided one of its first housing advocacy grants to the Center for Leadership and Justice to expand its successful No More Slumlords campaign which culminated in changes to Hartford's housing code, including a licensing program for buildings over 40 units. CLJ provided training to Hartford residents to advocate for an effective launch of the licensure program, including identifying and overcoming barriers to implementation. In 2022, the foundation provided a second grant to CLJ to organize and advocate for enforcement of the City of Hartford's housing code.

Like two other proposals where we have submitted supportive testimony, the foundation also appreciates the intent of **Senate Bill 1264, An Act Requiring A Notification Of Rights To Parties Before A Fair Rent Commission** to strengthen and improve transparency of fair rent commissions. We support the efforts of Senate Bill 1264 to provide clear notifications about parties' rights and the commission's legal authority. We support the proposal's requirement that parties be notified both in writing and through an announcement at the beginning of each hearing about their rights and the commission's lawful scope of authority.

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.