



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on  
House Bill 5508, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight  
Committee Judiciary Committee**

**March 20, 2024**

Good afternoon, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on **House Bill 5508, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.**

**The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** In the past two years, the Foundation has distributed more than \$104 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 \$998 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 invests in efforts that remove barriers to economic success and increase social cohesion and the perception of community safety. To help accomplish this, the Foundation invests in programs and systems-building to provide education, physical and mental health care, job training and work-based opportunities, and other youth services to support their success, prevent incidences of violence, divert youth from incarceration, and support their families.

**The Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported this work; however, the state must lead the support of justice system-involved youth and their families and diverting young people from incarceration.** Public commitment must also address the interconnection across basic human needs programs and systems to increase access to healthy food, physical and mental healthcare, and housing services and to provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations and state agencies delivering these services.

The Hartford Foundation has focused on opportunity youth, defined as individuals aged 16 through 24 who are not in school or working and may be involved in the foster care and/or the juvenile justice systems. Data continues to show that youth of color are far more likely to be referred to juvenile justice services than their white peers, and at younger ages. Early involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a lasting impact, disconnecting young people from their families and communities and limiting their access to opportunities, often making it more challenging to achieve their full potential.

**We support House Bill 5508's focus on developing gender responsive practices and policies for justice-system involved youth.** The Foundation applauds the legislation's effort to conduct a landscape analysis and gap assessment of gender responsive work in this state. We support the inclusion of input from youth, families and communities directly impacted by any gaps in gender responsive work. We also appreciate the recommendations to further define gender responsive practice, review national best practices, and system considerations, and to review of data by race, ethnicity, gender, age, location and level of system involvement, type of offenses, and how different offenses are handled within the juvenile justice system. There are many approaches to gender responsive practice. This detailed analysis will expand our understanding of what works for different youth participating in gender-responsive programs. A recent [issue brief](#) presented by the University



of New Haven's Tow Youth Justice Institute discusses the considerations in addressing the challenges and gaps in providing gender responsive care for girls dealing with trauma.

The Foundation and providers who work with youth in the juvenile justice system have long recognized that in order to truly understand the issues and develop effective solutions to existing challenges, you must engage those who have experienced the systems. Capturing these perspectives helps to generate authentic buy-in. The landscape analysis will allow the state to assess what is working and what we need to do differently to effectively engage our youth.

As part of the Foundation's collaborative partnership with Dalio Education, the Tow Foundation, and the City of Hartford to support opportunity youth, the Boston-based nonprofit, [Roca, Inc.](#) was brought to Hartford with the specific purpose of serving young women, including young mothers who are victims of abuse and neglect. **Prior to launching work in Hartford, there was discussion and consensus building around whether this work was adequately supported.** Roca's outreach intensive work provides something that many of the traditional community safety, wellness, and violent interventions efforts had not yet done: focus on young mothers, including justice-involved youth. Roca is addressing this inequity by providing tools, resources, programs, and networks to help young women and their children at the center of urban violence heal from trauma and build up resilience.

In 2018, the Foundation awarded a three-year, \$260,000 grant to the [Center for Children's Advocacy \(CCA\)](#) to expand its services to adolescents and young adults from Greater Hartford who are making the difficult transition away from justice-system confinement or Department of Children and Families involvement. CCA's legal support provided the groundwork that can help youth reestablish important connections, find a safe place to live, get back into school, or get a job that leads toward future security.

In December 2022, the Foundation supported **Capital Workforce Partners' BEST Chance Partnership**, a network of reentry and job training programs, working with Career Resources, Inc., Community Partners in Action, and other partners. The Foundation also supports smaller nonprofits, including through a two-year grant in 2022 to the **Second Chance Reentry Initiative Program**, which collaborates with partners to support court-referred and other opportunity youth to address trauma and build the skills needed to secure and sustain career pathways.

The Foundation lauds the Legislature's recognition of the importance of collaboration and engagement among state agencies by engaging the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, the Departments of Children and Families, Education, and Correction in consultation with the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee to develop a reentry success plan for youth released from incarceration. This collaborative effort recognizes the variety of interventions and support previously incarcerated youth need to successfully reintegrate into the community.

The Foundation also supports House Bill 5508's call to develop a plan that incorporates restorative and transformative justice principles, including the provision of individualized academic support and a recognition of the role of school districts in ensuring the provision of academic, vocational, and transition support services. We also applaud the proposed plan's emphasis on connecting youth to vocational and workforce opportunities to support young people in gaining basic education and industry skills to join the workforce. The plan's emphasis on providing for the basic needs of youth, including developmentally appropriate housing and trauma-informed mental health and substance use treatment recognizes the unique and complex, layered needs of justice-involved youth.



The Foundation supports the bill's proposal to develop a plan for successfully reintegrating young people into the community. A key element includes using credible messengers as mentors, transition support providers, and reentry coordinators for up to two years following the release of a child from incarceration. The Foundation's reentry program includes support for newer programs, such as the Second Chance Reentry Initiative Program (SCRIP), led by people who have experienced incarceration and successful reentry. An important aspect of the work includes regular "stick to the SCRIP" meetings with a network of people who have returned to the community to share their experiences and what helps in tackling challenges.

The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to improve community safety and to support youth to give them the support they often need to avoid involvement with the justice system, and make a successful transition, and thrive in their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfpg.org](mailto:policy@hfpg.org) or 860-548-1888.