



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

Senate Bill 922, An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

February 16, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Kelly, Representative Haines and distinguished members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **Senate Bill 922, An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts.**

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. In 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 \$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.

Recognizing the value of postsecondary education and training to the economic mobility of middle- and low-income students, the Foundation provides approximately \$1.3 million in college scholarships, with more than 700 students receiving new and renewed scholarships, each year. The scholarships are awarded through more than 100 funds created at the Hartford Foundation by individuals, families and organizations. The Hartford Foundation's scholarship program includes \$140,000 in block grants to local two-year colleges for scholarships to needy students and \$100,000 in block grants to local four-year schools for awards to students transferring from community colleges.

With a high percentage of older and first-generation students and the most diverse student body in Connecticut, [Capital Community College](#) plays a central role serving youth transitioning from DCF care in Greater Hartford. In December 2021, to support CCC in better serving its student body, the Foundation provided a grant to for its on-campus **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Center Initiative** designed to help connect students to both internal and external support programs needed to persist and complete their studies and move on to gainful employment.

In 2022, the Foundation provided a \$45,000 community organizing grant to the Student Loan Fund to support its work to develop leaders to reconstruct the systems of higher education funding and financing that disproportionately impact people of color and first-generation students. The Student Loan Fund is a borrower-



led organization focused on developing leaders and building power to change the predatory debt systems created to fund higher education. With an average debt of \$36,000, borrowers are struggling to build wealth, contribute fully to their families and engage deeply with their communities. Student debt is a racial equity issue, as Black women owe more than any other group.

Transcript withholding is a practice that prevents students and alumni from accessing their transcripts due to debts owed to the educational institution. This practice prevents students from continuing their education, transferring credits, and getting jobs. Transcript withholding disproportionately harms low-income students and those who do not complete their degrees, who struggle to pay what they owe before they have completed their degree and obtained a good paying job. There are numerous other methods an institution of higher education could employ to pursue outstanding debts without resorting to withholding transcripts. Transcript withholding does not prevent schools from pursuing outstanding debts.

It should also be noted that the vast majority of students who are in a position to do so repay their college loan debts, recognizing the serious financial harm that can be done if they don't. Students unable to pay their debts should still have access to their transcripts to allow them to finish their studies and obtain a job to ensure that they can make payments in the future.

For these reasons, the Hartford Foundation offers its support for Senate Bill 922, An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts to end this flawed and inequitable practice.

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that all Connecticut residents have equitable access to opportunities to obtain the education and training they need to support themselves and their families.

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.