



Hartford Foundation

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Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on
Senate Bill 145, An Act Appropriating Funds for the Homeless Response System
Senate Bill 143, An Act Concerning Eviction for Cause
Housing Committee
February 20, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Khan, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, 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 Senate Bill 145, An Act Appropriating Funds for the Homeless Response System, and Senate Bill 143, An Act Concerning Eviction for Cause.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford 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 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.

In addition, the 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 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 the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide HOMEConnecticut Campaign. The mission of HOMEConnecticut is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in an equitable community of their choice. The Foundation and many partners throughout the state recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. **Given the need, the Hartford Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported this work for many years.**

According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing 2023 Index](#), rising housing costs have exacerbated housing affordability as 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. Rising housing costs are also reflected in increased eviction and homelessness rates. If we are to sustain progress and continue tackling social challenges, the state must lead the effort to provide adequate resources to prevent and eliminate homelessness in Connecticut. Public-Private partnerships must also address the interplay between housing and other basic human needs (e.g., food, health services) in providing adequate funding and technical assistance to the nonprofit organizations delivering these services.

The Foundation **supports Senate Bill 145, An Act Appropriating Funds for the Homeless Response System** which would infuse **\$20 million to stabilize and strengthen Connecticut's Homeless Response System.**

This includes:

- **\$5 million annualizing Cold Weather Emergency Response Program Funding** to keep Connecticut residents from freezing outside.
- **\$6 million to DOH and \$1.4 million to DMHAS annually to strengthen shelter and outreach capacity** to provide homeless and housing service organizations with funding for necessary staffing and operational costs.
- **\$3.6 million to increase and annualize funding for Diversion and Coordinated Access Network (CAN) Hubs** to continue to increase diversion rates and for CAN hubs to connect people with critical support and resources to resolve their housing crises.
- **\$2 million to increase and annualize funding for the Coordinated Access Network Backbone Agencies** to prevent system interruptions and maximize performance of the agencies that lead the emergency Homeless Response System and effectively organize the system of care.
- **\$2 million to annualize Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool** to help individuals, families, and youth overcome financial barriers.

Prior to COVID, Connecticut had made tremendous strides in reducing homelessness, due in large part to the hard work and dedication of the nonprofit providers working directly with housing insecure residents. Unfortunately, this progress has been reversed by the pandemic. With increased workloads, historic underfunding, and greater competition to hire and retain staff, the need to increase funding for our homeless prevention system has never been greater.

The Foundation's past and current grants focus on preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford. Historically, the Foundation has awarded approximately \$1 million annually to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and landlord negotiation, employment services, and other services to residents at-risk or experiencing homelessness. Our portfolio includes smaller, annual emergency assistance grants made to proximate organizations providing urgent food, clothing, financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses) and domestic violence aftercare. Critically, the Foundation supports work to address systemic barriers to quality, stable, affordable housing, including the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network that facilitates coordination among homelessness and housing nonprofits and groups.

The Foundation also provided a grant to the Connecticut Bar Association to support the evaluation of the Right to Counsel pilot program that formally launched in January of 2022. The organizations providing direct legal services under the program are Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Veterans Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and New Haven Legal Assistance Association.

Feedback from our grantees and the most recent data available reflect a need to double-down on homelessness prevention and diversion:

- Based on the January 2023 Point in Time Count, 3,015 people were experiencing homelessness, compared to 2,930 in January 2022, nearly a three percent increase. For eight years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Connecticut had been declining.
- Research confirms that structural racism disproportionately exposes people of color to poverty, housing and employment discrimination, incarceration, and health disparities, creating unique barriers to stable housing. Of the 3,015 households in Connecticut that experienced homelessness in 2023, 28 percent were Black/African American, while making up only 10.5 percent of the state's population.



The Foundation also offers its support for **Senate Bill 143, An Act Concerning Eviction for Cause**. This represents the expansion of existing Connecticut law which already 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.

Unfortunately, most Connecticut renters have no protection against no-fault evictions. People 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. This past October, the Foundation 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 have traumatic and lasting effects on families. Evictions 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 will also 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 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.