



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony

House Bill 6554, An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs

Senate Bill 909, An Act Establishing a Right to Housing

Housing Committee

February 2, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Luxenburg, 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 House Bill 6554 and Senate Bill 909.**

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. Over 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 \$940 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 Latinx 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.

While the Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have and will continue to support this work, the state must lead the effort to prevent and eliminate homelessness in Connecticut. Public commitment must also address the interplay of basic human needs, including housing, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations delivering these services. To this end, the Foundation **supports House Bill 6554, An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs.**

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. Each year, the Foundation awards approximately \$1 million 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. In 2021, the Foundation began to shift its support of homelessness service providers by offering multiyear core support and program grants that complement a broader group of Foundation's investments in homelessness prevention and housing security. 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 ensures 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 2022 Point in Time Count, there were 2,930 homeless people in Connecticut at the time, an increase of 13 percent from 2021. This represents the first increase in more than a decade.
- In Greater Hartford, between January and November 2022, 630 heads of houses (561 individuals and 69 families) entered the shelter system. Thirty percent were previously unhoused, 36% were previously at an emergency shelter and 19 percent came from an institutional setting (e.g., jail, psychiatric hospital, or substance abuse treatment center).
- Over the past year, more than 82,382 calls were received by Hartford's 2-1-1 information and referral service from people searching for housing or housing assistance. Of these calls, 45 percent needed assistance with shelter placement and two Hartford ZIP codes ranked in the state's top five for requests related to housing and shelter.
- In the last year, the cost of renting an apartment in Hartford has increased more than 14 percent. Cost increases place the greatest pressure on low-income households, and data confirms that BIPOC Connecticut households are disproportionately housing cost-burdened and at risk of experiencing housing instability and homelessness. Nearly one-third of Black renter households spend more than half of their income on housing.
- With the removal of the COVID-19 eviction moratorium, experts anticipate that 2022-2023 will see a record number of individual facing housing instability, with Connecticut eviction filings on track to reach its highest number since 2017. Nonprofit partners working in the rehousing space report that landlords are now requiring income information on rental applications, even if 100 percent of an individual's rent will be covered by a housing voucher.
- 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 2,930 households in Connecticut that experienced homelessness in 2022, 38 percent were Black/African American (while Black/African Americans only make up 10.5 percent of the state's population).



The Foundation also offers its support for **Senate Bill 909, An Act Establishing a Right to Housing**. This bill directs state agencies to consider the right to housing when adopting policies and regulations, prioritizing the interests of those with low and moderate incomes. We credit the Committee for including an expansive list of policy prescriptions, such as legal and financial assistance, which recognize people disproportionately impacted by homelessness, including people of color, returning residents, and LGBTQ adults and youth.

We also laud the Committee’s proposed creation of a Right to Housing Committee whose membership will include those with expertise in issues related to housing and homelessness, especially those most impacted by a lack of access to housing. The Foundation has partnered with state and municipal public partners to ensure that residents and nonprofits are invited to bring their expertise to public working groups and that they are compensated for their time. The Foundation welcomes working with the Committee to ensure that residents with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity can contribute to its solutions.

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 the life’s basic necessities including safe and secure 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.