



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in support of

House Bill 7263, An Act Concerning The Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy And Planning Committee

Appropriations Committee

April 3, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Somers, Representative Nuccio and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of House Bill 7263, An Act Concerning The Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy And Planning Committee. The foundation applauds the legislature's efforts to ensure that this committee includes more comprehensive representation of behavioral health interests, including a focus on substance abuse.**

The foundation recognizes the invaluable role of the Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy And Planning Committee which makes recommendations on the governance and administration of the children's behavioral health care system to the legislature and executive agencies to ensure equitable access to services. The committee includes a diverse range of stakeholders with expertise on the interrelated systems that impact children's behavioral health. This includes legislators, representatives from children's hospitals, advocacy groups, state agencies, tribal representatives, and others connected to children's behavioral health services. The [Tow Youth Justice Institute](#) provides staffing and facilitating the committee's work, which includes other children's behavioral health stakeholders in the state. This work acknowledges that children's behavioral health encompasses mental health and substance use disorders, as well as overall psychological well-being.

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 mental and physical health, food, housing, and the digital divide. Our work focuses on providing a safety net and improving the lives of residents in Greater Hartford. We support nonprofits as they do vital on-the-ground work necessary to support residents facing mental and physical health challenges, job losses, falling into homelessness or facing another day without food. Our support for basic human needs provides a necessary foundation for all of our other work to be successful.



Data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) reveals that nearly one in five children are challenged by mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. These challenges only worsen for adolescents between the ages of 13 to 18 according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) where it is estimated that 49.5 percent facing a mental health challenge at some point in their lives. These challenges encompass a wide range of issues, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, conduct disorders, mood disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders, and self-harm behaviors. [Suicide](#) is the second leading cause of death for US adolescents, this is often linked to pre-existing mental health problems. Youth living with mental health challenges can also face other difficulties including substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors. Additionally, youth facing mental health challenges may encounter subsequent difficulties [with drug use and risky sexual behaviors, increasing their vulnerability to HIV, STDs, and unintended pregnancy.](#)

The foundation offers its support for House Bill 7263's proposed addition of two new members who are providers of substance abuse treatment services for young adults. The foundation also supports the legislation's proposal to include a Behavioral Health Advocate alongside the existing membership of the Healthcare Advocate and Office of Child Advocate. This addition will help to ensure that there is an independent voice to ensure that there is accountability within the systems supporting children's behavioral health. As the legislature has acknowledged over the past several years, it is crucial that the state expand its efforts to provide a broad range of services to address children's behavioral health needs.

[Research](#) finds that African American men with depression are significantly less likely to seek help compared with White men. In recognition of the substantial and distinct mental health needs of Black boys and men, last year the Hartford Foundation and the **Beta Iota Boulé Foundation ("Boulé")** announced a collaboration to support the mental health of Black boys and men. The Boulé has made an investment of \$400,000, with the Foundation matching up to \$600,000 to create a \$1 million impact. In December 2024, members of the giving circle awarded [five grants](#) to five community-based organizations in an effort to increase accessibility and options for support.

These grants utilized a variety of strategies including courses on Mental Health First Aid to teach people to help those experiencing mental health problems or crises. Other strategies included students participating in classes to gain critical knowledge on mental health, Equine Assisted Therapy for Black men and boys, a grassroots communications campaign to engage Black male students, and expanded access to clinical therapy.

The foundation has made a long-standing commitment to raising up youth voice in the development of programs and policies designed for them. In 2024, the foundation provided a grant to **Tow Youth Justice Institute** to support its event, **Pathways to Success: Trailblazers and Innovators in Youth Justice Conference**. This educational forum focused on learning what interventions have helped Connecticut youth, improvements to the juvenile justice system, the complex needs of the small number of youth



who recidivate, and the innovative strategies that have been put in place to address those needs and the impact on public safety. The foundation's support allowed greater Hartford youth to attend and participate in panels at the event including the provision of stipends to each participant. Attendees heard directly from youth who have been positively impacted by legislative reforms put in place to find alternative, more therapeutic interventions when youth are just being youth.

Through our investments in our local Alliance Districts, the foundation recognizes the vital role our local school district's play in the lives of students beyond academics. This includes helping to ensure that all of students have access to nutritious food and physical and behavioral health services.

For example, [Windsor Public Schools](#) has provided Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Justice Practices and Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) using a differentiated professional development model. Using a grant from the foundation, the district's Office of Family and Community Partnerships supported wrap-around efforts as the district implemented other interventions through research and evidence-based strategies, including parent teacher home visits and a family resource center, which included referrals for behavioral health services.

For many years, the Hartford Foundation has supported the work of nonprofit organizations providing substance abuse treatment. This includes a 2023 grant to support [Community Health Resources \(CHR\)](#), which provides an array of services to thousands of Connecticut residents, including mental, behavioral, and addiction supports for youth.

The Hartford Foundation appreciates this effort to broaden the committee's expertise and perspective on children's behavioral health issues, and its focus on substance abuse treatment for young adults. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to supporting those most in need. We welcome the opportunity to continue partnering with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to ensure that our children and families receive the support they need to thrive.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.