



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in support of
Senate Bill 0017, An Act Concerning Funding For Municipalities For Early Voting Costs
Appropriations Committee**

March 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Somers, Representative Nuccio and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony **on Senate Bill 0017, An Act Concerning Funding For Municipalities For Early Voting Costs. The foundation supports the legislature’s efforts to ensure that all eligible voters have the ability to make their voices heard at the ballot box. We appreciate the recognition that a critical step in effectively implementing early voting is ensuring that Connecticut’s cities and towns have adequate resources to cover increased costs for staffing, developing materials, marketing, voter education, and other work needed to ensure secure and fair process that can engage voters. Both state and local government entities charged with this work need support in covering costs over and above what their election budgets can support.**

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 in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports **civic and resident engagement** in our region. The foundation is committed to expanding community voice and leadership across its [strategic priority areas](#) to inform increasing access to food, shelter, health and other basic services; post-secondary education; thriving neighborhoods with affordable housing and other services; the arts, as well as civic and resident engagement.

For several years, our grantmaking has included supporting nonprofits with close ties to Greater Hartford communities and residents underrepresented in voting to implement nonpartisan “get out the vote” activities and participation in local government sharing ideas on how resources could be used to improve life in communities. We have seen that voter registration is often not enough in engaging eligible residents not participating in the voting process. We need credible messengers to engage underrepresented populations. Nonprofits and community groups supported by the foundation have worked to develop resident leadership and create opportunities for collective action. The foundation and its partners recognize that it is vital that policy decisions are informed by a diverse group of residents who are impacted by the actions at City Hall and the State Capitol. We are pleased to share our research, experience working with nonprofits doing this work, and what we are learning.



Research shows consistently low rates of voter registration and turnout among particular populations in our region of underrepresented voters. The populations in Greater Hartford with the lowest rates of voter participation are people of color, especially Black and Latine voters; young voters between the ages of 18-29; and residents of the City of Hartford. Despite the best efforts of nonpartisan and political organizations seeking to engage voters, [CT Data Collaborative's 2024 Election Analysis](#) showed that voter participation declined statewide from 80 percent in the 2020 presidential election to 76 percent in 2024. East Hartford saw a significant decline, with turnout dropping 15 percentage-points, from 66 percent to 51 percent. Hartford's turnout has consistently declined over the last three elections, from 63 percent in 2016, to 50 percent in 2020, to only 43 percent in 2024.

Voter participation in Hartford's November 2023 municipal election was less than 15 percent of all eligible voters. Reports from our civic and resident engagement grantees in 2023 highlighted voter apathy as a factor to address in grassroots engagement, highlighting resident mistrust of the political system, lack of voter knowledge, and residents feeling their vote did not matter. According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Wellbeing Index](#), 63 percent of White people surveyed reported that they perceive the government to be responsive compared to 48 percent of both Black people and Latine people.

The Hartford Foundation recognizes civic participation, including voting, as one of the most impactful ways to create sustained, positive changes in our daily life. Research indicates that higher levels of civic trust, participation, and engagement are correlated with more equitable economic outcomes, positive health outcomes, and lower crime rates.

The foundation's legislative advocacy has consistently supported additional state efforts to expand legally eligible voters' access to the ballot box, including no-excuse absentee voting and early voting. By creating additional days for people to vote, including evenings and weekends, Connecticut has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that every eligible voter has the opportunity to participate in the voting process. In its previous testimony in support of early voting, the foundation has raised that providing more days to vote places an additional burden on municipal registrars of voters and town clerks.

We support the intent of Senate Bill 0017 to reimburse municipalities for additional expenses incurred from implementing early voting. As we experience as funders, the foundation recognizes that state resources are limited and there are many needs to address; however, providing additional resources to municipal governments for the increased administrative costs associated with expanding voting access through early voting options should be a priority.

At a time when the public trust in government and the importance of voting has significantly diminished, it is crucial that Connecticut cities and towns have the resources they need to run elections effectively and efficiently. We recommend that the Committee also consider ensuring that the Office of the Secretary of State (SOTS), as Commissioner of Elections for the State of Connecticut, has adequate resources to meet its charge to administer, interpret, and implement the election laws and ensure fair and impartial elections. The SOTS has the same responsibility for federal elections as well. This would help ensure the integrity of the electoral process and ensure that state and local



government entities can work collaboratively to effectively manage early voting without sacrificing other essential services.

Over the past seven years, the Hartford Foundation has provided more than \$1 million in grants for voter education and registration activities across Greater Hartford. In 2024, the foundation awarded nearly \$240,000 in grants to fourteen nonprofit organizations to support nonpartisan voter education and civic engagement activities leading up to the 2024 general presidential election to increase participation and encourage civic participation beyond the election and voting. Grants have focused on supporting improving the ability of residents to influence government and other institutional decision-making and increasing civic trust.

We have learned through our grantmaking and work with nonprofits supporting voter engagement activities that more must be done to engage residents underrepresented at the polls, including nonpartisan resident education on the voting process and local issues to ensure residents understand what they will see on ballots and why voting matters in municipal, state, and national elections. While early voting and no-excuses absentee ballots represent important steps in the right direction, state agencies and municipalities overseeing elections must also consider issues such as lack of public transportation, language barriers, and adult literacy challenges which can impede the ability of legally eligible voters to participate in the democratic process.

The Hartford Foundation is eager to continue partnering with legislators and advocates to support efforts to ensure that all residents have a voice on critical issues and the solutions that are responsive to and reflective of our entire community.

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.