



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

Senate Bill 17, An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 8, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, 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 17, 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 \$97 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 \$894 million since its founding in 1925.

In Greater Hartford, there are a number of good paying jobs available, but there is misalignment between the skillsets required and the skills of the current workforce. The Foundation's efforts focus on preparation, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and youth disconnected from school and work.

For example, among students from Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts where participation rates in postsecondary training are comparatively low, our efforts aim to increase career exposure and post-secondary degree and credential completion, leading to better employment opportunities.

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.

In 2020, the Foundation awarded five grants to four colleges (Asnuntuck Community College, Capital Community College, Goodwin University, Manchester Community College) and one nonprofit organization (Hartford Promise), totaling \$234,788 to reach students who have worked hard to advance their studies but struggle to overcome the additional challenges that arose during the pandemic. All five initiatives leveraged a combination of wraparound supports including: increased access to technology or related supports for remote learning; academic and social integration, peer mentoring or coaching; microgrants to address basic human needs or enable access to books or academic materials; and stipends for students to replace lost income. Hartford Promise's Urgent Needs for Promise Scholars program established a pool of emergency funds for students



enrolled in Manchester and Capital community colleges. For many, these funds allowed them to continue their studies without needing to take on extra jobs to support themselves and their families.

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.

This past year, the Foundation provided a \$25,000 ACCESS grant to support the Student Loan Fund Borrowers' Collective in 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 Borrowers' Collective 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 a position to do so do 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 17, 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 ensure all Connecticut residents have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods and all residents have the resources they need 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.