



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on  
House Bill 5213, An Act Concerning Disconnected Youth**

**Education Committee  
February 28, 2023**

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in on **House Bill 5213, An Act Concerning Disconnected Youth**.

The Hartford Foundation is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, over the past two years, we have distributed \$104.5 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 \$948 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our strategic efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable economic and social mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to **increase stable employment and career opportunities for youth and adults in our region facing multiple barriers**.

This work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a sustaining wage. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing opportunities for education and training along with hiring and retaining residents with significant barriers to employment, including opportunity youth disconnected from school and work and people returning from incarceration.

**We applaud efforts of the state to become a full partner in this work by addressing the need for additional research. We strongly recommend state efforts be informed by previous recent studies and fully engaging nonprofit and philanthropic organizations that have been involved in working with disconnected youth. We appreciate the attention in the legislation to a wide range of considerations, including looking at graduation requirements, improving access to transportation to and from school, facilitating access to and participation in credit recovery programs, providing regional trauma coordinators at education centers, and measuring outcomes.**

The recent report [Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis: Getting young people back on track](#), sponsored by one of our philanthropic partners, Dalio Education, has helped to draw attention to one of the greatest challenges facing Connecticut, the tens of thousands of young people across the state in danger of becoming disconnected from school and the work place. This has devastating consequences for the present and future of Connecticut. **Without adequate support, these young people struggle to secure the skills to participate in the workforce and our recovering economy. We are grateful that legislators recognize the need to act and address the needs of our youth to ensure a better future for them and our state.**

Dalio's report acknowledges what many policymakers, educators, and youth service providers have known for a long time. While the majority of youth disconnected from school and jobs are concentrated in our urban areas, they can be found in every community throughout the state, including in low-income rural communities. This is a statewide challenge that demands a comprehensive statewide response that engages policymakers, community leaders, providers, youth, and parents to develop effective strategies to meet the needs of vulnerable youth and families.

Through the Hartford Foundation's investments in education and workforce development initiatives, we have seen firsthand how the interplay across race, gender and where people grow up can have in compounding youth disengagement. This is a matter of racial equity and increasing engagement and opportunities for disconnected youth. There is a critical need to support youth in building basic and professional skills while providing wraparound supports they need to be successful.

According to a recent **Tow Youth Justice Institute (TYJI)** [Issue Brief discussing the Dalio report](#), young people of almost all races/ethnicities are more likely to experience disconnection compared with White young people, with Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaskan Native young people being twice as likely. Black or African American young people have the second strongest association at 1.8 times that of White young people. Young men of color are particularly vulnerable to disconnection, with 41 percent of this population ending up disconnected. Twenty-nine percent of young men are disconnected versus 20 percent of young women, indicating heightened risk of disconnection dependent on sex. **The TYJI report also provides recommendations for future analyses that can help guide the research efforts in this legislation.**

Through its work in support of Hartford's Community Schools and six of Greater Hartford region's Alliance Districts (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Manchester, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks), the Foundation has seen how stronger partnerships among schools, families, nonprofits, and the community help students feel increased connectedness to their school, leading to increased attendance, academic engagement, and persistence to graduation. As the General Assembly has acknowledged with its recent investments in mental health services for children and youth, young people face unprecedented challenges that make it more difficult to persist and achieve in the classroom.

We know that school districts are looking to engage in career pathways work starting in middle school and continuing through high school. Some districts are interested in partnering with nonprofits to start exposing their students to vocational opportunities, which could include after-school and summer programs. Providing work-study opportunities would also be beneficial. **The Foundation supports the proposed legislation's call for Technical Education and Career System and for the labor commissioner to develop a model student work release policy.**

**The Foundation also supports House Bill's 5213 inclusion of a provision to provide students with free bus passes to make transportation to and from school and work easier.** To reduce barriers that many high needs students and participants in workforce development programs often encounter, the Hartford Foundation has long supported providing funding to cover a wide range of wraparound supports, including for transportation.

Many Greater Hartford residents lack adequate access to transportation. According to the [Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing Index 2023](#), the rate of transportation insecurity was 21 percent people who did not attend college and 32 percent for adults making less than \$30,000 per year. According to Census data, vehicle availability varies by race and ethnicity and by the number of workers in the home. Among households with at least one working-age member but without any employed members, 59 percent of Black households and 52 percent of Latino households had no access to a vehicle. Only 21 percent of white households in this group lacked vehicle access. In households with one employed adult, 18 percent of Black households lacked vehicle access and 17 percent of Latino households lacked access to a vehicle. This compared to three percent of white households with one employed adult lacking vehicle access.

For many years, the Hartford Foundation has invested in programs that offer pathways for students, young adults, and families to develop skills that can lead to family sustaining employment. In partnership with **Capital Workforce Partners**, [Hartford Public Schools](#), and local nonprofits, we have provided year-round youth employment focused on basic competencies and work-based learning, which have included work with opportunity youth. Our support of the

**BEST Chance** reentry program brings together workforce development, adult education, and other partners to deliver an integrated basic skills training model. The program now is part of a collaborative effort to serve youth released from correctional facilities through the Pathway Home Program. The Foundation is also a supporter of [Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program](#) (SYELP) which connects many youths to their first substantive work experience further building the Hartford future talent pipeline. This initiative also connects youth across the Hartford region with paid summer jobs.

**The Foundation applauds House Bill 5213's focus on sharing data and fostering collaboration among organizations serving youth.** Through our own investments in this work, we recognize the challenges and opportunities that exist to facilitate better communication, collaboration and sharing of information. Our investment in the [Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#) engages a broad range of providers which seek to develop a coordinated, comprehensive system of training and supports to youth ages 16 to 24 who are unemployed as well as for youth involved in the justice and child welfare systems. Part of this effort is focused on developing definitions of data to collect, and collecting and sharing data not only with Collaborative organizations but other efforts that engage opportunity youth.

The Foundation credits legislators for engaging the [Two Generational Advisory Board](#) to study the challenges and solutions to reengage youth in school or the workplace. The Advisory Board includes members of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as private sector partners and parents who offer different perspective and experience in supporting young people. **We encourage the legislature to fully engage youth and young adults as issues are explored to tap their lived experience of the education, workforce, and other systems. They can speak directly to why young people have become disconnected.**

In 2021, The City of Hartford had 8,504 opportunity youth residing in Hartford with 37 percent identified as Hispanic/Latino and 55 percent identified as Black. Fifty-two percent of these youth identified as female, and 45 percent identified as male. Since mid-2021, youth providers report that the number of opportunity youth in Hartford overall had dramatically increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic along with an increase in gun violence in the City of Hartford, which has disproportionately involved and impacted this youth population.

In August 2021, the Hartford Foundation partnered with the **City of Hartford, Dalio Education** announced an initial 18-month investment of \$9.85 million to support opportunity youth, who are individuals 16 – 24 who are currently disengaged from school or work. The funding was provided to [COMPASS Youth Collaborative](#), [Our Piece of the Pie](#), and [Roca, Inc.](#) to allow these organizations to provide individualized, trauma-informed, high-touch support to the young people they specialize in working with:

- COMPASS to expand its [Peacebuilders](#) programming model, increasing the number of violence interrupters in Hartford working to de-escalate conflict and build relationships with the hardest to reach youth.
- OPP to significantly increase the capacity of the [Youth Service Corps](#), allowing it to serve 100 additional young people, on top of the approximately 250 young people they currently serve annually. Former Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin led the creation of the Youth Service Corps in 2016 to give young people part-time jobs as well as one-on-one coaching and mentoring.
- Roca, a national youth-serving organization that is also working in Massachusetts and Maryland, came to Hartford to offer a program [specifically serving young women](#), including young mothers, who are victims of abuse and neglect.

In 2023, the Foundation made an additional commitment to invest \$4 million to support this work. All of these organizations should inform the work outlined in the legislation.



The Foundation has also supported the [United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut](#) to fund the [Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford](#) initiative that works directly with employers and other partners, including Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology. This effort involves working with employers to ensure that they are hiring opportunity youth, providing a competitive wage, providing a welcoming work environment, and offering opportunities for career advancement.

This past summer the Foundation joined Capital Workforce Partners, the City of Hartford, United Way of Central and Northeastern CT, along with other public and private funders to increase the talent pipeline. The newly created **Hartford Youth Career Navigation System** helps young adults investigate career options and achieve sustainable employment. The Foundation awarded the final matching funds to hire a Career Navigation System Coordinator, who will help manage a network of outreach workers, mentors, teachers, and case managers.

**The Foundation also offers its support of House Bill 5213's efforts to capture what public and private services are already serving opportunity youth and identify gaps for enhancement.** The Foundation has experience in working with the many dedicated nonprofit organizations serving at-risk youth. We encourage the state to develop strategies that enhance and compliment effective programming already in place and to provide more supports and opportunities for youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfp.org](mailto:policy@hfp.org) or 860-548-1888.