



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on

House Bill 6875, An Act Concerning the Issuance of a State Identification Card or Motor Vehicle Operator's License to a Person Being Discharged from a Correctional Facility

Judiciary Committee

March 15, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on **House Bill 6875, An Act Concerning the Issuance of a State Identification Card or Motor Vehicle Operator's License to a Person Being Discharged from a Correctional Facility.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. In 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 improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase stable employment that advance careers for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment. Our efforts work towards accelerating inclusive economic growth and increasing opportunities for engaging people who often have been left behind. This requires us to educate, train, and retain talent, including underserved and underrepresented populations, to meet the needs of employers more fully.

The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing training opportunities, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

While philanthropy anticipates continuing to financial support to address these community needs, adequate public funding is essential. Addressing the complex needs of returning citizens, including basic human needs in employment, education, access to food, mental and physical health care, and housing requires public-private partnerships. No single entity can do this work alone.

Addressing all these needs also requires proof of identity. Our shared interest is supporting successful reintegration that promotes community safety by reducing recidivism and the wellbeing of returning citizens and their families. This requires providing adequate support to nonprofit and government organizations delivering these services.

Since 2016, the Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help men and women returning c the community succeed, including preemployment training and job placement assistance offered through the Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford, coordinated by Community Partners in Action, and the BEST Chance Partnership program, led by Capital Workforce Partners. The programs provide individuals with



access to basic services and referrals to other programs, including in supporting participants in navigating securing IDs. Our evaluation of the Reentry Welcome Center (RWC) revealed that RWC staff have been working on an agreement with the CT Department of Motor Vehicles that would support a more efficient process for retrieving state IDs and licenses.

Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced the need to acknowledge key issues including:

- The stigma of incarceration can undermine the ability of returning citizens to successfully reenter into the community and to access training, secure employment and other services.
- With access to training that leads to jobs, people coming home from prison have the ability make a successful transition and contribute to their families and community.

Through evaluations of the reentry work the Foundation has supported, we have learned how not having state identification negatively affects the ability to navigate everything from employment, to securing driver's licenses, housing and public benefits. The need to secure state identification prior to release has been a longstanding reentry issue.

Hartford Foundation staff serve on the BEST Chance Advisory Committee along with staff from the Department of Correction and other stakeholders. DOC staff have described the challenges experienced in securing birth certificates and other identification, including for returning citizens born in Puerto Rico or other jurisdictions. The department has made progress to improve its efforts to secure state identification but continue to face some barriers. One way to improve is to start the process of identifying people leaving a facility earlier to allow more time to secure the documentation necessary to issue a state ID or driver's license.

In order to ensure this legislation can address current challenges, it must be informed by DOC experience in grappling with this longstanding challenge. All of the challenges staff have experienced must be addressed, including ensuring the resources needed to cover fees and staff to manage the paperwork and other supports.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, government partners, advocates, and businesses to address barriers to employment and expand access to supports for returning citizens to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce, achieve economic stability, and have opportunities to reach their potential, thrive and enhance Connecticut's economy.

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.