



## **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of**

### **House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning Child and Family Nutrition**

#### **Public Health Committee**

**March 18, 2024**

Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Somers, Representative Klarides-Ditria and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning Child and Family Nutrition.**

The [Hartford Foundation](#) is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, the Foundation has distributed \$104 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 \$998 million since its founding in 1925.

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 access to food, stable housing, physical and mental health care, and the digital divide.

**The Hartford Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported increasing food security across the Greater Hartford region for many years. To advance efforts to ensure children and families throughout Connecticut have the nutrition they need to thrive, the state must lead efforts to invest in preventing and eliminating food insecurity.** Public commitment must also address the interconnection across basic human needs programs and systems to increase access to healthy food, and physical and mental health and housing services and to provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations and state agencies delivering these services.

To advance these goals, the Foundation supports House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning Child and Family Nutrition, which directs the Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the Departments of Human Services and Agriculture, to develop and implement a plan to streamline cross-enrollment of any child receiving services under HUSKY A, the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), and the Connecticut Farmers' Market/Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP). **This collaboration is essential in ensuring vulnerable families with children can sustain access to vital nutrition supports as they transition from program to program.**

Accessing nutrition programs across agencies often requires busy families with limited transportation and other resources to navigate eligibility requirements and timely registration to avoid gaps in benefits. The bill includes important recommendations that promote common application processes, access to



simple fact sheets, coordinating recruitment, and developing collaborative plans to reduce food insecurity. This collaboration across food security programs for families with children holds great promise for increasing access to food by preventing gaps in services and fostering greater coordination across programs, longstanding systemic challenges. The legislation also promotes additional summer nutrition sites and grants to increase participation when school-year programs are not operating.

Through the Hartford Foundation's data-informed grantmaking, we have seen an increased need among families with children, exacerbated by the pandemic and its lingering effects, to access adequate food, health, and other basic services. For many years, **the Foundation has provided annual grants to address basic human needs (totaling approximately \$7 million each year) to support both regional and local agencies in Greater Hartford in providing direct services and addressing systemic challenges.** The grants tackle a range of related issues from increasing access to emergency shelter, diversion of homelessness, physical and mental health care, as well as food security and healthy food choice and other supports for wellness. This past year, the Foundation's investments included more than \$574,000 in **Emergency Assistance Grants** to 65 nonprofit organizations throughout the region. These grants prioritized nonprofits that serve neighborhoods and towns in the region with a higher percentage of residents living in poverty and seek to reduce barriers to equitable access to basic needs.

As reported in [DataHaven's 2023 Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing Index](#), with rising inflation, many Connecticut families have struggled with food insecurity. In 2022, the food insecurity rate in Connecticut was 17 percent, with Latino households experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity at 34 percent and Black households at 25 percent, compared to 11 percent of White households.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, food prices in 2022 increased year-over-year an average of 11.4 percent, some categories (including eggs and poultry) reaching as high as 21.5 percent, with no categories reporting price decreases. While the rate of increases has in some cases decreased in 2023, rising food prices have continued to impact family income leaving fewer dollars to address other basic needs.

In November 2022, the Foundation awarded a three-year, \$550,000 grant to [Connecticut Foodshare](#) to support Greater Hartford food distribution and its Value-Added Product food rescue program. Growers and distributors are partnering to smooth out projected steep variations in revenue during the next three years. According to the demographic data and census tract information of Connecticut Foodbank's target population, an estimated 39 percent of its constituents are people of color.

In December 2022, the Foundation awarded \$200,000 over three years to [Hartford Food System \(HFS\)](#). The agency's work takes place throughout the Greater Hartford region, with a particular focus on Hartford. HFS works collaboratively with other nonprofit organizations to provide a systems-based approach that focuses on the root causes of food insecurity and challenges across food systems. HFS has also been successful in engaging Hartford residents to promote food justice and an equitable food economy.

**The Foundation supports the necessary collaboration across programs and agencies of House Bill 5003 to ensure that the state can facilitate and maximize access to a continuum of vital nutrition benefits for low-income families with children. With WIC programming concluding when a child reaches the age of six, it is critical that the state ensure that vulnerable families with children can access SNAP**



**support.** The Foundation applauds this effort to enhance coordination across Departments of Public Health and Social Services and Agriculture to establish a seamless process for children who are six years of age or older and no longer eligible to receive services from the federal WIC program to transition to the SNAP program. By creating a memorandum of understanding between DPH and DSS, these agencies support formalizing data sharing on enrollment in HUSKY A and WIC and other coordination. The Foundation also applauds the bill's inclusion of joint outreach to individuals who are or may be eligible to receive services from both HUSKY A and WIC.

The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to prevent and eliminate food insecurity. We invite policymakers and other stakeholders to meet with us to explore how philanthropic dollars can support service gaps and foster equitable strategies to support Connecticut residents with significant unmet needs.

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