



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony on
House Bill 6888, An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice
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 this opportunity to submit written testimony **on House Bill 6888, An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice.**

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 \$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 \$948 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 invests in efforts remove barriers to economic success and increase social cohesion and the perception of community safety in Hartford. To help accomplish this, the Foundation invests in programs and systems-building to provide education, job training and other youth services to support their success, prevent incidences of violence, divert youth from incarceration, and support their families.

While the Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have and will continue to support this work, the state must lead the effort to support youth and their families and divert young people from incarceration. Public commitment must also address the interplay of basic human needs, including housing, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations delivering these services.

The Hartford Foundation has focused on opportunity youth, defined as individuals aged 16 through 24 who are not in school or working and may be involved in the foster care or the juvenile justice systems. Data continue to show that youth of color are far more likely to be referred to juvenile justice services than their white peers, and at younger ages. Early involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a lasting impact, disconnecting youth from their families and communities and limiting their access to opportunities, often making it more challenging to achieve their full potential.

We support House Bill 6888's inclusion of a community-based diversion system and to expand it, as needed, for use by police officers instead of arresting children, when appropriate. As we look to expand diversion programming, we offer the approach taken to expand the support to young mothers and other opportunity youth needing safe and therapeutic community-based program options. The work required using data to demonstrate the unmet need and engaging youth-serving and other stakeholders to explore services needed. This helped to ensure that the infusion of funding did not duplicate services.

This past year, the Hartford Foundation along with partners Dalio Education, the Tow Foundation, and the City of Hartford, announced a \$9.6 million investment for a continuum of supports for opportunity youth. The funding goes to [COMPASS Youth Collaborative, \(COMPASS\)](#), [Our Piece of the Pie \(OPP\)](#) and [Roca, Inc.](#) Roca is a Boston-based youth-serving organization now operating in Hartford, specifically serving young women, including young mothers who are victims of abuse and neglect [in Hartford.](#)

Together, the three nonprofits are working to provide a coordinated, holistic continuum of care for opportunity youth in Hartford and serve as strong referral partners to and for other youth-serving organizations. Roca's work is designed to complement services provided by the other local youth-serving agencies, specifically COMPASS and OPP. COMPASS



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serves predominantly male youth often touched by violence. OPP serves youth who may be ready to reconnect to school and employment but still need significant supports. COMPASS is experienced in connecting to high-risk youth, engaging them in relationships to support them in being ready and able to succeed in education, employment, and life. OPP engages youth ages 14 to 24 facing multiple obstacles, some at risk of dropping out of school or already have or involved in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. Others are underemployed or both out of school and work. OPP has structured its programs to help youth overcome systemic barriers and guide them through high school and toward the goals of obtaining a college degree, vocational credential and/or employment.

In 2018, the Foundation awarded a three-year, \$260,000 grant to the **Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA)** to expand its services to adolescents and young adults from Greater Hartford who are making the difficult transition away from justice-system confinement or Department of Children and Families involvement. CCA's legal support provided the groundwork that can help youth reestablish important connections, find a safe place to live, get back into school, or get a job that leads toward future security. CCA is part of the ecosystem of nonprofits working with Roca, COMPASS, and OPP to address the needs of opportunity youth in Hartford.

In December 2022, the Foundation supported **Capital Workforce Partners' BEST Chance Partnership**, a network of reentry and job training programs, working with Career Resources, Inc., Community Partners in Action, and other partners. The Foundation also supports smaller nonprofits, including through a two-year grant in 2022 to the **Second Chance Reentry Initiative Program**, working with court-referred and other youth to support them in addressing past trauma and in building the skills needed to secure and sustain career pathways.

The Foundation also supports House Bill 6888's expansion of the Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act to include pedestrian stops and provide additional data to prevent racial profiling by state and local law enforcement. Having good data is essential, but data alone will not improve relations between law enforcement and youth. Through our work, we have learned that officers need additional support in building their knowledge of youth development and deescalating encounters with youth. We hope that the work of the **Connecticut Institute for Youth and Police Relations** can help inform approaches to reducing profiling youth of color.

In 2020, the Foundation partnered with the Travelers Championship to co-fund a \$400,000 police training initiative led by the University of New Haven's (UNH) Center for Advanced Policing and Tow Youth Justice Institute. The Connecticut Institute for Youth and Police Relations is working with police departments throughout Greater Hartford to build understanding among officers working with youth of youth brain development as well as de-escalation techniques. The goal of the program is to enhance education and training available to police officers—informed by community perspectives—to build the skills needed to balance the demands of public safety and the best interests of youth and communities of color. Local officers who go through the program **examine how racial biases can result in disparate treatment of youth** and others in communities of color and **work to build their ability** to assess difficult situations. The first class of 14 officers graduated in September 2021 and has begun implementing these strategies in their local departments in Hartford, West Hartford, East Hartford, Glastonbury, Bristol, Windsor, and the University of Connecticut.

The Foundation also supports the provision in House Bill 6888 that expands the membership of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee to include four persons who are able to provide a voice for those living in communities of high juvenile arrest rates, including two of whom are under twenty-six years of age and have been impacted by the juvenile justice system. The Hartford Foundation's strategic civic and resident engagement grantmaking is designed to raise community voices to articulate critical neighborhood issues and to inform policy and practice. We have seen how the perspectives of residents can provide insight on what has and hasn't worked. We also applaud the inclusion of parents and other community perspectives and support the bill's language to reimburse these new members for expenses incurred from participating in this group including transportation and childcare costs. It is important to recognize that people should have the support they need to fully participate in this vital work. The Foundation extends these accommodations in its own investments.



The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to improve community safety and to support youth to give them the support they often need to avoid involvement with the justice system, and make a successful transition, and thrive in their communities.

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.