

**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony in support of
House Bill 6667, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice
Policy and Oversight Committee**

Judiciary Committee

March 31, 2021

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 **in support of House Bill 6667, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.**

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 2020, the Foundation distributed a record-breaking \$52 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 \$837 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 programs that remove barriers to economic success, and increase social cohesion and the perception of community safety in Hartford. To accomplish this, the Foundation invests in programs and systems-building to provide education, job training and other support services to returning citizens to support their success and prevent reincarceration.

The Foundation offers its support of House Bill 6667 based on its intent to keep children out of the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems and to develop options for diverting youth to other programs and mitigating the potential long-term developmental impact. These provisions include:

- An expansion of the existing ban on suspensions and expulsions of children in preschool through grade two to twelfth grade, with a phased-in plan.
- Limit both the number of cases eligible for mandatory and discretionary transfer in order to decrease the population of youth in the adult criminal justice system.
- Adoption of a “second look” provision for all youth transferred to adult court who receive sentences of incarceration. This “second look” will require a sentence review within 50% of their sentence, or by their 18th birthday (whichever comes first) to determine the need for continued incarceration.
- Provide for the automatic erasure of certain juvenile records, and elimination of the petition requirement that exists in current law, which youth and families rarely access.

Board of Directors

Theodore S. Sergi, Chair
Rodney O. Powell, Vice Chair
Andrew R. Worthington, Treasurer
Nancy P. Bernstein
Marlene M. Ibsen
Min Jung Kim
Estela R. Lopez
Mark Overmyer-Velazquez
Richard. N. Palmer
David M. Roth

President

Jay Williams



Hartford Foundation

FOR PUBLIC GIVING

Together for good.®

- Establish a pre-arrest juvenile diversion model that holds youth accountable for low-level misbehavior while diverting them from any court processing or formal arrest record. The model is based on a youth's offense and prior history, and requires in each case that law enforcement provide an alternative response in lieu of an arrest.
- Ensure that telephone services or any other telecommunications services provided to a child confined in a correctional facility or transferred to Department of Correction be provided free of charge. Maintaining connections to family plays a vital role in maintaining stability for youth and is crucial to planning their reentry.
- Expand the membership of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee to include two community members and two youth (must be under 26 years of age) with first or second-hand justice system involvement. Having community voices at the table who have lived experienced with our justice system is vital to making more informed decisions about what works and what doesn't. Far too often low-income people and people with children are unable to participate in such groups. Funding should be provided for stipends, transportation, and child care to enable member attendance.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass legislation banning suspension or expulsion of children in preschool through the 2nd grade. This legislation excluded instances where a child's conduct was of a violent or sexual nature. In 2018, the Center for Children's Advocacy, Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc. and the Office of the Child Advocate produced a policy issue brief *"Setting Young Children Up for Success: Decreasing Suspensions by Investing in Social and Emotional Development."* The targeted interventions and approaches focus on training for school personnel, implementation of alternative in-school disciplinary practices, family engagement, screening for health and mental health concerns, and strengthening connections to community-based services and supports including trauma-informed mental health interventions.

Unfortunately, the most recent data from the Connecticut Department of Education shows that implementation of these measures are not consistent across all school systems, and suspensions and expulsions continue at a higher rate for children of color. Black and Latinx students who receive a suspension or expulsion are involved in more than one incident during the school year at a greater rate than their white peers. In three of four cases, Black students were more likely to receive a more severe sanction such as an out-of-school suspension or expulsion for similar behavior than both Latinx and white students. Latinx students were more likely to receive a more severe sanction than white students in two of the four cases.

We know that youth of color are also far more likely to be referred to juvenile justice services than their white peers. Early involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a lasting impact on youth, disconnecting them from their families and communities and limiting their ability to be successful in school. Raising the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction from seven years of age to 12 would create a more developmentally appropriate approach by utilizing existing services provided by the state, youth service bureaus, nonprofit community-based services and juvenile review boards. These services include support services, mentoring and individual counseling.

In 2019 the Hartford Foundation's Catalyst Endowment Fund provided grants to support youth involved in the juvenile justice system, including a grant to COMPASS Youth Collaborative's NAVIGATE program to support youth who reside at the Hartford Juvenile Detention Center. The program uses an evidence-



based social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum created to help youth overcome trauma and make positive life choices. Using youth mentors, young people received support to navigate the reentry process – and have access to support for four years after their release. In 2018, the Foundation for Public Giving awarded a three-year, \$260,000 grant to the Center for Children’s Advocacy to expand its services targeting adolescents and young adults from Greater Hartford who are transitioning from justice-system confinement or Department of Children and Families involvement. Youth leaving the justice system or aging out of foster care are at great risk of a critical misstep in successful community reintegration. CCA’s legal support provides the groundwork that can help youth reestablish important connections, find a safe place to live, get back into school to finish credits needed toward graduation or get a job that leads toward future security. This type of programming could have a powerful impact on keeping youth out of the justice juvenile system.

In 2020, the Foundation partnered with the Travelers Championship to co-fund a three-year \$400k police training initiative led by the University of New Haven’s Center for Advanced Policing and Tow Youth Justice Institute. The **Connecticut Institute for Youth and Police Relations** program is working with police departments throughout Greater Hartford to enhance training to assist officers in balancing the demands of public safety and the best interests of Black, Latinx and other diverse youth. A program goal is to build bridges between the police and communities they serve. Instruction is provided by University of New Haven faculty with expertise in youth justice, child development, and community policing. The curriculum also includes conversations with justice-involved youth and focuses on changing approaches to situations that arise in the field and strategies for deescalating them while integrating restorative justice approaches. By developing these strategies, law enforcement can maintain better relationships with youth in the community they serve and reduce arrests and altercations.

The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to improve community safety and to support our youth to give them the support they need to avoid involvement with the justice system and support justice involved youth 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@hfp.org or 860-548-1888.