



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on

House Bill 5242, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of Criminal Records on Housing Opportunities

**Housing Committee
February 27, 2024**

Good evening, Senator Moore, Representative Antonio, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on **House Bill 5242, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of Criminal Records on Housing Opportunities.**

Most people in Connecticut prisons eventually return to their communities and need access to basic supports to effectively reintegrate into the community, including stable housing, access to mental and physical health care services, food, and workforce training and job opportunities. Without access to stable, secure housing, people who have returned home from incarceration often find it difficult to secure and maintain employment and meet other basic needs.

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 \$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 \$998 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase stable employment that advances careers for adults and youth in our region who often are left behind. This commitment 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 and access to basic education that support completing high school and post-secondary opportunities that lead to hiring and retaining residents, with a focus on Black and Latine individuals. The data show significant barriers to employment, especially for men and women returning from prison and jail and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

The Hartford Foundation has supported this work for many years. We know that programs with public-private funding are better able to address the layers of need and sustain the work. Adequate public support is essential if we are to address housing, wraparound substance abuse counseling, and physical and mental health needs that data show are prevalent in youth and adult reentry populations. No one entity can do this work alone. The work requires strong partnerships.

Through our grantmaking and listening to community residents, the Hartford Foundation has seen and heard how essential access to basic human needs is throughout the Greater Hartford region in meeting the immediate challenges of residents. Our investments in supporting people returning from



incarceration have shown that ensuring people's access to these basic needs, are essential to rebuilding their lives.

The Foundation appreciates the provisions in House Bill 5242 that seek to balance landlord and tenant protections and to open housing options for people with criminal records, including federally assisted housing operated by housing authorities as well as housing managed by private landlords when the building has more than four units. We support the requirements that landlords provide notice to rental applicants when a criminal conviction arises and consider mitigating factors in reviewing the convictions of applicants, including the nature of the offense, circumstances, time since the conduct, age at the time, evidence of rehabilitation, employment status, and tenant history before and after the conviction. Housing providers covered by the legislation must provide applicants with at least five business day notice to respond and present relevant mitigating information regarding the conviction and evidence that the applicant would be a suitable tenant. Men and women returning from incarceration typically want to support themselves and their families in law-abiding ways. This bill provides an opportunity to demonstrate their progress and secure essential housing.

The Foundation also supports the bill's provision to allow rental applicants to report noncompliance and discriminatory practices by landlords covered by the bill from the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The Foundation is not familiar enough with the issues to weigh in on the approach for implementing this process; however, we recognize it is vital that the system is responsive, effective, and efficient to ensure compliance and adequate enforcement.

The [2024 State of Reentry \(SOR\) Report](#), commissioned by Career Resources Inc. in collaboration reentry center and other leaders, highlights the barriers people face upon their release. The report continued to document that Black/African Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans are disproportionately represented within Connecticut's prison and jails relative to their population size in Connecticut, which underscores the need to address racial discrimination in access to housing opportunities.

Department of Correction data in the report indicated that 16 percent of people in the study reported immediate housing instability. Reentry welcome center providers in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury reported higher housing insecurity.

When individuals are released from incarceration and reentering the community, they often have no personal housing that they own or rent. People reentering are often reliant on family and friends to provide them with housing while they find a job and attend to other basic needs to make a successful transition. When that is not available and families or friends have limited resources, people reentering must rely on transitional housing or shelters that are provided by the state, town, or a nonprofit. **This is the third year that the annual State of Reentry study documented persistent challenges related to housing insecurity.**

Since 2007, the Hartford Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including reentry planning pre-release, job readiness and industry training, housing, health, transportation and other basic needs, and job placement assistance. This has included support for the [Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford](#) led by **Community Partners in Action**, with additional funding



from the City of Hartford and other state and federal resources and working with a broad referral network of service providers. Since 2015, the Foundation also has been supporting the [BEST Chance reentry program](#) coordinated by **Capital Workforce Partners**, with support from the Connecticut Department of Labor and other funding, and a network of training and other providers. Both programs also provide returning citizens with access to basic services and referrals to community-based food, shelter, health, and other programs. Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced important lessons:

- Housing is an essential resource, without which most people cannot succeed.
- The stigma facing returning citizens who seek housing, employment, and successful reentry into the community undermines their rehabilitation.
- Individuals can become contributing members to their families and community, and their success should be recognized and rewarded.

Reentry housing has been closely studied, including by the Commission on Equity and Opportunity, and a number of proposals have been presented. In 2018, Foundation staff participated in the Commission's broad, multisector Reentry Working Group about housing options and barriers that Connecticut residents experience as they return to their communities after incarceration. In 2019, two bills were proposed that arose in part from the recommendations of the Reentry Working Group, which reflected thorough research and input from state and municipal agencies, advocates, nonprofits, and landlords. Like House Bill 5242, these two proposals sought to establish a defined "lookback period" for landlords conducting criminal background checks upon a prospective tenant, reflecting research showing that the likelihood of recidivism declines over time after individuals return from prison. **Landlords could still access prospective tenants' criminal records for a set number of years after release. Lookback periods simply help ensure that returning citizens who do not reoffend years after their release get the second chances they deserve.**

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, government partners, advocates, and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment and access to education support for returning citizens, including access to housing 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.