



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

House Bill 5239, An Act Expanding the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

February 29, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Kelly, Representative Haines and distinguished members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of House Bill 5239, An Act Expanding the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program.**

The Hartford Foundation is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, over the past two years, we have 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 strategic efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equitable economic and social mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to increase stable employment and career opportunities for youth and adults in our region facing multiple barriers.

We support the bill's proposal that the Office of Higher Education establish a collegiate awareness and preparation program in Connecticut as part of the minority advancement program,. **We applaud the work to develop linkages with targeted public-school systems to motivate and support skill development for middle-school or high-school students who are disadvantaged, including students from low-income families and first-generation postsecondary education students.** We have seen through our grantmaking and evaluation the need to expose students to alternative career pathways earlier and to build in opportunities to experience career options through high school, so students know their interests, have adequate orientation to what the pathways require, and are ready to take advantage of post-secondary education.

For many years, the Hartford Foundation has worked with the Alliance School Districts in the Greater Hartford region (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks) to support them in improving their performance. **We urge that the allocation of \$4,800,000 for the new program prioritizes those school districts where data show a significant number of low-income students of color and where students have limited access to post-secondary education. It is also vital that these grants are sufficient to address organizational challenges nonprofits may encounter.**

Our work recognizes that all residents of our region need access to training and employment options that provide a sustaining wage. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing opportunities for education and training along with hiring and retaining residents with significant barriers to employment, including opportunity youth disconnected from school and work and people returning from incarceration.

The Foundation also applauds House Bill 5239's effort to enhance the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program by providing grant opportunities to nonprofit organizations providing these services. We



have worked with a number of nonprofits in our region and offer our thought partnership to share what we have learned with the Office of Higher Education as the new program is implemented.

The Foundation also appreciates the bill's effort to establish one-year award period and increased funding for these efforts which will provide opportunities for more organizations to benefit from these grants. We urge extending funding to nonprofits of different sizes and levels of expertise, including Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations.

The bill establishes a preference for, but not limited to, existing collegiate awareness programs with a demonstrated record of successful completions by students. We want to acknowledge the challenges in reaching chronically absent or disconnected students that some nonprofit programs have experienced during the pandemic and still linger. **We recommend establishing reasonable criteria for demonstrating a track record for student completion that acknowledges the challenges of engaging students with the greatest needs around access to postsecondary education opportunities.**

Last year, the Foundation awarded a grant to [Trio New College Network \(Trio\)](#), a community-based college success nonprofit organization, which launched inaugural sites in 2021 in Detroit, Newark, and Camden, New Jersey. Trio has expanded its work into Connecticut and has partnered with local foundations to launch a Greater Hartford site to serve BIPOC residents looking to complete their college degrees while working full-time. Trio provides underserved students with access to an innovative online degree program that is accelerated, flexible, and affordable. Trio partners with Southern New Hampshire University to offer a Competency Based Education (CBE) program designed to build workplace-relevant competencies that meet the hiring needs. This responds to the challenge of ensuring that post-secondary education reflects the skills needed in today's job market.

According to the [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Equity Report](#), only 17 percent of Hartford residents have obtained a Bachelor's degree or post-graduate degree, compared to 41 percent of all Connecticut residents. In 2023, the Hartford Foundation gave a grant to [Hartford Youth Scholars \(HYS\)](#) to provide academic and mentoring support to students before entering 7th grade and continuing through college graduation. HYS programs are designed to address the needs of every student, as well as to provide them and their families with a nurturing and supportive community throughout high school and college. With frequent communication, academic monitoring, and special attention to the college process, HYS tailors its programming to each individual student's situation to ensure that they have the supports they need to obtain a college degree.

The Foundation has also provided support to [Hartford Promise](#) scholarship program including grants for the organization's **Integrated College Success Model** to increase the number of Hartford Promise Scholars and enhance academic persistence for college enrolled Promise Scholars. Ninety percent of Hartford Promise scholars are students of color, 75 percent are low-income students, and 70 percent are first generation college students. Foundation funds supported staffing costs for full-time and part-time "Reaching Back" and "Reaching Forward" coaches to work with a subset of on-track high school students and college enrolled Promise Scholars, respectively, to maximize the number of Hartford public high school students who are eligible for Hartford Promise scholarships and ensure the current scholars successfully persist in their college studies.

With a high percentage of older and first-generation students and the most diverse student body among Connecticut's community colleges, [Capital Community College \(CCCC\)](#) plays a central role in serving low-income



Black and Latine students in Greater Hartford. To support CCC in better serving its student body, the Foundation provided a grant to support its on-campus **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Center Initiative** designed to help connect students to both internal and external support programs needed to complete their studies and move on to gainful employment.

The Center provides a welcoming “single stop” where students and staff can get assistance in an atmosphere of trust and encouragement, providing all students with a single staff person and/or a team to go to for help who will follow their progress and intervene if needed, while partnering with community-based organizations to address students’ basic human needs. The in-take process and referrals for basic human needs are addressed in a manner which leverages students’ cultural assets and identities to minimize the sense of exclusion they may feel as they interact and learn on a college campus.

Recognizing the value of post-secondary education and training to the economic mobility of middle- and low-income students, the Foundation provides approximately \$1.5 million in college scholarships, with more than 600 students receiving new and renewed scholarships each year. **Our work recognizes students must have adequate resources to attend college, including many students of color** [do we know what percentage?]. The scholarships are awarded through more than 100 funds created at the Hartford Foundation by individuals, families, and organizations. The Hartford Foundation’s scholarship program includes \$140,000 in block grants to local two-year colleges for scholarships to needy students and \$100,000 in block grants to local four-year schools for awards to students transferring from community colleges.

These types of initiatives are typically labor intensive and challenging; however, they can make a real difference in helping students get into college, persist, and achieve their academic and career goals. By providing increased resources to the organizations providing these services, the state can ensure that more of our young people can have equitable access to opportunities to obtain the education and training they need to support themselves and their families.

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.