



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on
Senate Bill 885 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General
Government
Appropriations Committee
Friday, March 26, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to offer testimony **on Senate Bill 885, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government.**

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 seeks to **increase stable employment opportunities for adults and youth in the region who are facing barriers to employment.**

In Greater Hartford, there are a number of job openings, but there is misalignment between the skillsets required and the skills of the current workforce. The Foundation's efforts focus on increasing hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and youth disconnected from school and work. Among students in Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts, our efforts aim to increase career exposure and post-secondary degree and credential completion, leading to better employment opportunities, including 2Gen approaches that focus on training, childcare and supports for basic needs including housing stability, food security and mental and substance use supports.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving President Jay Williams serves as a member of Governor Lamont's Workforce Council to support Connecticut's efforts to create a better pipeline between high school and postsecondary education, increasing access to workforce training programs, and improving use and collection of workforce data. The Foundation recognizes the need for a coordinated, dedicated and sustaining funding streams.

These initiatives require hundreds of stakeholders to be coordinated so that an array of different perspectives informs the different recommendations and implementations. Since

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the inception of the Governor's Workforce Council, the Office of Workforce Strategy has been effective in coordinating different stakeholders across the state and organizing them into collective action to execute on the goals and objectives of the various initiatives in the plan. Ensuring the Office of Workforce Strategy has the organizational flexibility it needs to ensure continued effective coordination and completion of the different initiatives of the GWC will be paramount.

The Foundation applauds the efforts of the Office of Workforce Strategy in not only executing on the strategic initiatives outlined in the strategic plan, but also on engaging with businesses, educators, and community organizations to build, in real-time, a more agile and coordinated workforce. By engaging businesses such as the organizations on the Workforce Council, the OWS is coordinating stakeholders to build a workforce that is driven by the needs of industry.

The Foundation also appreciates the OWS' work with primary and post-secondary educational partners across the state to ensure that their curriculum is flexible enough to meet the rapidly changing needs of business. This past fall, the Foundation awarded five grants to organizations to assist students who have worked hard to earn postsecondary qualifications but have been struggling to overcome the additional challenges that have arisen throughout 2020. Hartford Promise scholars and students at Asnuntuck, Capital, and Manchester Community Colleges, and Goodwin University have been offered a combination of wraparound supports, including increased access to technology or related supports for remote learning; academic and social integration peer mentoring or coaching; microgrants to address basic human needs or enable access to books or academic materials; and stipends to replace lost income.

We believe this work must center on equity in recognition of the structural and institutional barriers due to racism that must be addressed to make change. These wraparound supports have been effective for both post-secondary credential and degree programs as well as for more traditional workforce training programs to ensure that youth and adults with the greatest barriers are able to complete their course of study. These efforts require extensive coordination and reliable funding streams. An evaluation of several workforce programs funded through the Foundation's Career Pathways Initiative, working with organizations such as the YWCA Hartford Region, Journey Home, Hartford Public Library and Chrysalis, found these supports to be essential to participants' success. These supports extend beyond academic support and include transportation, childcare, and basic human needs, such as food. The Foundation encourages the legislature to increase support for these services, such as by expanding access to Care 4 Kids, to ensure that residents with the greatest barriers to obtaining a job with family-sustaining wages have the opportunity to participate and complete college and career training programs.

The Foundation is pleased to see that the OWS has been making efforts to coordinate with community-based nonprofit organizations to ensure the needs of all residents are reflected in the programs and structures that are being developed. We would encourage OWS to embed community engagement practices in its work going forward to more effectively respond to the changing needs of residents, particularly those in our urban communities of color who have been harmed by generations of systemic



racism. It is vital that the OWS not only work across all of these different stakeholders, but also align them under a unified state strategy.

The Foundation hopes that this new office will continue to work with nonprofit organizations providing workforce training to support program alignment with the state’s workforce goals. OWS can also build relationships with foundation and other philanthropic workforce development investors to strengthen public/private partnerships.

For many years, the Hartford Foundation has supported and partnered with a variety of workforce programs in Greater Hartford including those managed by state agencies, institutions of higher education, workforce development boards and community organizations. Ensuring that these key stakeholders are being coordinated so that program objectives align to the unified strategic plan or program funding is effectively braided across all institutions is critical for Connecticut to prioritize and manage, and the OWS is working to accomplish this goal.

This proposal includes a provision to embed the OWS within the Department of Economic and Community Development for administrative purposes only that will continue to give the Office the flexibility to work with and across leadership in state government, companies, educational institutions, and other key stakeholders. This will help ensure existing and new workforce programs are effectively aligned and coordinated. Under the leadership of Chief Workforce Officer Dr. Kelli Vallieres, the OWS will advise Governor Lamont on all workforce related issues and provide staff for the Governor’s Workforce Council.

We are pleased to see the initiatives of the Governor’s Workforce Council come to fruition over the next few years and are extremely confident in the Office of Workforce Strategy to execute on this challenging but promising work. The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and businesses to eliminate barriers to employment for Black and Latinx residents to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce and achieve economic stability, and have opportunities to 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.