



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony on

House Bill 7112, An Act Concerning Housing And Homelessness And The Rental Assistance Program.

Housing Committee

March 4, 2027

Good afternoon, Senator Marx , Representative Felipe , Senator Sampson, Representative Scott and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 7112, An Act Concerning Housing And Homelessness And The Rental Assistance Program. While the foundation will not speak to all of the provisions included in House Bill 7112, we applaud the legislature’s recognition that the lack of affordable housing and increasing homelessness are complex challenges that require comprehensive strategies and intent to meet the challenge.**

Since 1925, the Hartford Foundation has proudly served as the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. This year, the foundation celebrates 100 years of service and remains committed to building an even greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, we have distributed more than \$100 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 \$1 billion since its founding.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latine communities, the Hartford Foundation supports basic human needs in our region, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address access to housing, food, physical and mental health, and the digital divide.

Many of the foundation’s past and current grants focus on preventing and reducing homelessness in Greater Hartford. Each year, the Foundation awards approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, warming centers, housing subsidies, case management, eviction prevention and other services to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Without adequate state funding, our investments only begin to meet the extensive need for emergency shelter and other housing services in Greater Hartford.

The foundation appreciates that House Bill 7112 is a comprehensive housing and homelessness initiative that introduces multiple programs and studies aimed at addressing housing challenges in Connecticut. This includes provisions to incentivize the construction of much needed housing stock, programs to expand access to rental assistance, protections for people experiencing homelessness, and recommendations for increased data collection and examining strategies to ensure Connecticut residents have the affordable housing options they need and deserve.

In 2021, the foundation began more fully supporting the mission of homelessness service providers by offering multiyear core support. Core support grants can be used flexibly to broadly support work



aligned with an organization's mission and the foundation's strategic goals. The Core support and targeted program investments in homelessness prevention and housing security have been critical in responding to growing need to address housing insecurity in Greater Hartford. The foundation's investments also include smaller annual emergency assistance grants made to proximate organizations providing urgent food, clothing, financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses) and other support services.

As critical is our support of work to address systemic barriers to quality, stable, affordable housing, including the [Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network](#) that focuses on ensuring homelessness and housing nonprofits and groups work together. To further these efforts, the foundation also supports the policy agenda of the [CT CAN End Homelessness](#).

Connecticut's homelessness response system continues to struggle from inadequate funding as the demand for services continues to rise.

- In 2024, there was a 13 percent increase in homelessness and a 79 percent increase in calls to 2-1-1 for housing and shelter.
- There are currently over 5,000 people experiencing homelessness, with more than 900 having no shelter.

In 2024, there were 20,706 scheduled Coordinated Access Network (CAN) appointments, 4,468 people diverted from shelter, and 7,567 people served by emergency shelter, transitional housing, and street outreach.

The foundation offers its support for several provisions in House Bill 7112 related to people experiencing homelessness including the proposed ban on "hostile architecture," designed to prevent homeless individuals from sitting or lying in public spaces. Much like a separate bill the foundation has supported to prevent the criminalization of homelessness, the foundation believes that this bill is a humane attempt to treat people experiencing homelessness with compassion and respect. We fully recognize that people who are homeless often have little or no options and need municipalities to support them in utilizing public spaces in ways that does not impact community safety. One example of supporting the humane treatment for people experiencing homelessness is the proposed pilot program to provide portable showers and laundry facilities for people experiencing homelessness.

The foundation also supports the bill's call for the collection of data on LGBTQ youth and young adults as experiencing housing insecurity. This is important step in documenting issues and expanding our collective understanding of housing challenges experienced LGBTQ people in Greater Hartford and throughout Connecticut. We have heard from our grantees who work to prevent and mitigate homelessness that a disproportionate number of youth and young adults the organizations work with identify as LBTQIA+.

Last year, the foundation partnered with [DataHaven](#) who authored the report, "[LGBTQIA+ Resident Wellbeing in Greater Hartford](#)," which demonstrates that there are striking disparities between LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ residents in terms of food insufficiency, housing stability, financial



security, health outcomes and difficulty accessing healthcare. Qualitative interviews with people working at LGBTQIA+ serving organizations echoed these different outcomes and pointed toward inequities including discrimination or systemic marginalization as drivers of these disparities.

The report raises the need for ongoing and improved data collection that will allow for a better understanding of this community's needs. We recommend drawing on the research organizations that developed this study to inform additional data collection plans.

In addition, the foundation offers its support for provision in House Bill 7112 directing the Majority Leaders' Roundtable to engage in a study on the state's extreme temperature protocols for protecting homeless individuals. We know that our region has experienced not only extremely low temperatures in the winter, but also extreme periods of unsafe heat in the summer months. These conditions can be life-threatening especially for people who are homeless. Developing a statewide strategy to more adequately respond to the needs of unhoused people during these occurrences should be a priority as it can often be a matter of life or death.

The foundation also invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase the social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latine communities, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the number of thriving Greater Hartford neighborhoods, with a focus on Black and Latine residents' quality of life. The foundation seeks to increase the number of thriving Greater Hartford neighborhoods, with an emphasis of promoting quality of life within Hartford's neighborhoods.

The foundation's Thriving Neighborhoods grantmaking strategy focuses on leveraging the strengths and assets of residents to empower community-driven agency and advocacy for social and economic development. Thriving Neighborhoods grants aim to empower Black, Latine, and other marginalized communities in the region by increasing stable housing opportunities, preserving and developing community assets, fostering small business growth, and strengthening social connections.

Given these interrelated issues, we urge legislators to support immediate interventions as well as to examine systemic challenges that are driving housing instability in Connecticut. Fundamentally, we want Hartford and other neighborhoods across the Greater Hartford region to have housing, education, employment opportunities and other services that allow community residents to thrive.

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide [HOMEConnecticut Campaign](#). Its mission is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in an equitable community of their choice. The partners of HOMEConnecticut recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve.

According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing Index](#), rising housing costs have exacerbated housing affordability: About a third of households are spending more than 30 percent of



their income on housing. Forty-nine percent of renters are burdened by housing costs, with higher shares among Black (55 percent) and Latino (54 percent) renters.

Rising housing costs are also reflected in increased eviction and homelessness rates. The DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey found that three percent of Black and Latino women and two percent of Black and Latino men in Connecticut said that they would have to leave their home in the next two months because they were behind on their rent or mortgages, compared to 0.5 percent of white women and 0.5 percent of white men.

[Statewide, rents have increased by 24 percent since 2017](#). More than 120,000 renter households spend [more than half of their income](#) on housing costs, well beyond the affordable target for housing costs of 30 percent of household income. After receiving a Section 8 housing voucher, many families then struggle to find an affordable housing in the location they want.

We know that Connecticut currently has a gap of more than 92,000 affordable homes, with a significant need for households earning below 30 percent of the Area Medium Income (AMI). It is estimated that there are only 34 homes for every 100 households at this lower AMI, leaving more than 70 percent with an affordable place to live.

The foundation recognizes the need to develop a broad array of housing options to meet the significant demand, and the need for municipalities to support, as a priority, development of multi-family affordable housing in various ways, including facilitating sewer system infrastructures. The foundation also supports the concept of facilitating bonding for affordable housing projects.

Recognizing the important role homeownership plays in family wealth building, in 2023 the foundation awarded a \$600,000 grant to the [Housing Development Fund \(HDF\)](#) toward its Homeownership Equity Fund which provided between approximately 30 BIPOC households in towns served by the Foundation with zero-percent loans for down payments and closing costs. The foundation offers support for House Bill 7112's authorization of bonding for municipalities administering a housing choice voucher home ownership program.

The foundation also applauds the bill's proposed establishment of a direct rental assistance pilot program, which would provide rental subsidies directly to eligible households. The program could help low-income renters find housing in the private market. For several reasons, many of Connecticut's traditional rental assistance vouchers administered by local housing authorities go unused. While much of this can be attributed to the extremely competitive housing market since the pandemic and the escalating rents that resulted, another significant factor is the reluctance of property owners to take rental assistance vouchers. These vouchers include a significant number of rules and regulations which make it a less attractive option for owners of rental properties. This pilot would provide renters with direct cash subsidies that they could use to cover their rent without the involvement of a third party, just like other renters. The pilot program provides an opportunity to determine if this way of providing support to renters is a more effective use of limited state funding for rental assistance.



The foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, philanthropy, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that will ensure all Connecticut residents have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

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.