

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

Testimony in Supporting of

Senate Bill 572: An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers.

Public Safety Committee

February 11, 2021

Representative Maria Horn, Senator Dennis Bradley, Senator Catherine Osten, Representative Alphonse Paolillo, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to testify **in support of Senate Bill 572, An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers.**

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, distributing roughly \$36 million in grants each year to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region.

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 and systems-building to provide education, job training and other support services to returning citizens to support their success and prevent reincarceration.

The Hartford Foundation supports the provision in Senate Bill 572 that would create reentry centers to assist individuals reentering the community from prison.

In December 2017, the Hartford Foundation provided a three-year, \$450,000 grant to Community Partners in Action, in collaboration with other nonprofits and government partners, to launch the Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center. The City of Hartford committed in-kind resources, including the Center's space in Hartford City Hall, located on 550 Main Street, and staff time to provide additional support. This public-private partnership has been working to change the course of the lives of men and women returning home from prison at the end of their sentences.

The Foundation is committed to assessing what works and funded an [evaluation](#) of the first year of the Center's operation that included focus groups of participants in the program. The assessment found that this collaboration is an effective means to ensure that returning citizens are immediately connected to the supports and services that can enable a successful reintegration into the community. The evaluation also revealed the need for additional work and policy changes to provide greater access to vital services such as housing and mental and physical health supports. The evaluation also pointed to the need for improved coordination and data collection among the partners. These findings and recommendations could prove to be a useful blueprint if the state were to create additional reentry welcome centers.

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The Foundation also supports SB 572's call for the creation of a Community Crisis Response Team to limit unneeded contact with law enforcement by dispatching appropriately qualified professionals to respond to 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls related to public assistance financial support, homelessness, substance use disorder and mental health crises.

The Foundation endorses the concept of ensuring that responses to 911 calls serve to deescalate situations and provide residents with the supports needed. In July 2020, the Foundation and the Travelers Championship announced a partnership to co-fund a three-year, \$400,000 police training initiative led by the University of New Haven's Center for Advanced Policing and Tow Youth Justice Institute. The CT Institute for Youth and Police Relations (CIYPR) is designed to enhance training delivered to officers in Greater Hartford to assist them in balancing the demands of public safety and the best interests of Black, Latinx and other diverse youth. The goal of the institute is to build bridges between the police and communities they serve. This program has received extensive support from local police departments throughout Greater Hartford. Their buy-in and commitment are crucial to the long-term success of this important initiative.

With the first cohort of the program launching this spring, the program will focus on police officers who have regular contact with young adults. CIYPR staff will integrate community perspectives on current policing to inform the curriculum and discussions with participating officers. At the conclusion of training, the officers will focus on a project intended to make lasting improvements in their departments' relationships with young people and families in their respective communities.

While additional community relations efforts are a part of the solution, it is also important to recognize that law enforcement has been asked to take on a wide variety of roles and situations it is not appropriately equipped to handle. As we see growing calls for police reform and social justice, Senate Bill 572 will improve first responses and connecting people with the support and resources they need, that many police officers do not have adequate training, time or resources to provide.

The Hartford Foundation believes that the passage and successful implementation of the Community Crisis Response Team will provide an important tool to respond appropriately to issues that disproportionately affect communities of color by limiting unnecessary contact with law enforcement and deploying qualified professionals to respond to 911 and non-emergency calls related to , mental health crises, domestic disputes, homelessness, substance abuse disorder and other challenges that require a measured response. This approach to law enforcement will reduce the incarceration rate and divert people to support and reduce unnecessary visits to the emergency room.

The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy and other stakeholders to improve community safety and to support returning citizens to give them the support they need to make a successful transition and contributing to 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.