



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
House Bill 7021, An Act Concerning Funding For Nutrition Assistance.**

**Human Services Committee
February 27, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Senator Harding, Representative Case and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **House Bill 7021, An Act Concerning Funding For Nutrition Assistance.**

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 food, stable housing, physical and emotional well-being.

The Hartford Foundation and other philanthropic organizations have supported increasing food security across the Greater Hartford region for many years. **To advance efforts to ensure children and families throughout Connecticut have the nutrition they need to thrive, the state must lead efforts to invest in preventing and eliminating food insecurity.** Public commitment must also address the interconnection across basic human needs programs and systems to increase access to healthy food physical and mental health, and housing services to provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations and state agencies delivering these services.

To advance these goals, the foundation supports House Bill 7021, An Act Concerning Funding For Nutrition Assistance. Through our work, we have seen increased needs among families with children to access adequate food, health, and other basic services. High grocery prices and the rising number of families with limited income struggling to make ends meet require the state to provide a safety net that ensures that students have the nutrition needed to learn and grow.

One in eight Connecticut children experiences hunger, with Black and Latine children making up a disproportionate share. By funding free school breakfasts, Connecticut can reduce child hunger and advance equity in health and education in communities across the state.



As reported in [DataHaven's 2023 Greater Hartford Community Wellbeing Index](#), with rising inflation, many Connecticut families have struggled with food insecurity. **In 2022, the food insecurity rate in Connecticut was 17 percent**, with Latino households experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity at 34 percent and Black households at 25 percent, compared to 11 percent of White households. The foundation continues to support DataHaven in providing current, actionable data on this issue. We also appreciate the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity first annual [report](#) issued in 2024 on food insecurity that can also inform this work: There are 65 Low-Income, Low-Access census tracts ("food deserts") in Connecticut with an average distance of at least one mile to a grocery store, and 207 with an average distance of at least 0.5 miles.

For many years, **the foundation has provided annual grants to address basic human needs (totaling approximately \$7 million each year) to support both regional and local nonprofit agencies across Greater Hartford in providing direct services and addressing systemic challenges.** Our grants tackle a range of related issues, including food security and healthy food choice and other supports for wellness. This past year, the foundation's investments included more than \$688,000 in **Emergency Assistance Grants** to 71 nonprofit organizations throughout the region. More than half of these grants were focused on for food or food assistance. These grants prioritized nonprofits that serve neighborhoods and towns in the region with a higher percentage of residents living in poverty and seek to reduce barriers to equitable access to basic needs. Our investments have helped to address a portion of the enormous need, but philanthropy cannot adequately address food insecurity without state investment in free food programs in public schools where access to food is essential.

In November 2022, the foundation awarded a three-year, \$550,000 grant to [Connecticut Foodshare](#) to support Greater Hartford food distribution and its Value-Added Product food rescue program. According to the demographic data and census tract information of Connecticut Foodbank's target population, an estimated 39 percent of its constituents are people of color.

In December 2022, the foundation awarded \$200,000 over three years to [Hartford Food System \(HFS\)](#). The agency's work takes place throughout the Greater Hartford region, with a particular focus on Hartford. HFS works collaboratively with other nonprofit organizations to provide a systems-based approach that focuses on the root causes of food insecurity and challenges across food systems. HFS has also been successful in engaging Hartford residents to promote food justice and an equitable food economy.

For the past eleven years, the foundation has worked to support seven of Greater Hartford region's Alliance Districts (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, Vernon, Windsor, and Windsor Locks). These districts have schools where the majority of its students—in many cases the entire student body—are eligible for free and reduced school lunches. **Most of the districts the foundation works with have asked us for assistance with supporting basic human needs for their students and their families, including access to food. As these districts and communities continue to develop strategies to improve student outcomes, ensuring that every student has access to nutritious meals is essential.**

Studies show a direct link between access to universal school meals and improved academic performance, attendance, and classroom behavior. Students feel safer in school with meals for all.



According to the Rockefeller Foundation, every dollar invested in providing healthy meals for students leads to at least two dollars in health, economic, equity, and environmental benefits.

The foundation support the provisions in House Bill 7021 which establish a supplemental nutrition commodities assistance program to be administered by the Department of Social Services. This program would purchase nutritional foods for soup kitchens, food pantries, and emergency shelters. The program will be managed by Connecticut Foodshare which will purchase food in bulk through in-state wholesalers or brokers and distribute it to existing food assistance organizations. The foundation also appreciates the proposal's inclusion of a requirement that at least 15 percent of the program's funds must be used to purchase produce or products from Connecticut farmers. **By providing \$10 million to support this program, the legislature can make a significant impact in the effort to address Connecticut's rising food insecurity challenge. This effort will also boost local agriculture and ensure more Connecticut families have access to high-quality, locally sourced food through existing community food distribution networks.**

The Hartford Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, the administration, advocates, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to eliminate food insecurity. We invite policymakers and other stakeholders to meet with us to explore public-private partnerships and ways philanthropic dollars could complement existing resources to help address funding gaps and foster equitable strategies to support Connecticut residents with significant unmet needs.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.