



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in support of
House Bill 7242, An Act Studying An Increase In Voter Participation
Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. The [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 7242, An Act Studying An Increase In Voter Participation. We support the legislature's efforts to nurture and promote civic engagement and ensure that all eligible Connecticut residents exercise their right to vote. Through the foundation's work with nonprofits supporting civic and resident engagement in Greater Hartford, we have seen the opportunities and challenges to consider.

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 in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports **civic and resident engagement** in our region. The foundation is committed to expanding community voice and leadership across its [strategic priority areas](#) to inform increasing access to food, shelter, health and other basic services; post-secondary education; thriving neighborhoods with affordable housing and other services; the arts, as well as civic and resident engagement.

Research shows consistently low rates of voter registration and turnout among particular populations in our region, referred to as "underrepresented voters." The populations in Greater Hartford with the lowest rates of voter participation are people of color, especially Black and Latine voters; young voters between the ages of 18-29; and residents of the City of Hartford. Despite the best efforts of nonpartisan and political organizations seeking to engage voters, [CT Data Collaborative's 2024 Election Analysis](#) showed that voter participation declined statewide from 80 percent in the 2020 presidential election to 76 percent in 2024. East Hartford saw a significant decline, with turnout dropping 15 percentage-points, from 66 percent to 51 percent. Hartford's turnout has consistently declined over the last three elections, from 63 percent in 2016, to 50 percent in 2020, to only 43 percent in 2024.

The Hartford Foundation recognizes civic participation, including voting, as one of the most impactful ways to create sustained, positive changes in our daily life. Research indicates that higher levels of civic trust, participation, and engagement are correlated with more equitable economic outcomes, positive health outcomes, and lower crime rates.



The foundation provides grants to support nonpartisan get out the vote activities and resident participation in local government to share their ideas on how resources could be used to improve life in communities. Nonprofit organizations and community groups supported by the foundation have worked to develop resident leadership and create opportunities for collective action. The foundation and its partners recognize that it is vital that policy decisions are informed by a diverse group of residents who are impacted by the actions at City Hall and the State Capitol.

We have learned through our grantmaking and work with nonprofits supporting these activities that voter registration often is not enough, especially for residents not already participating in civic activities. Engaging residents underrepresented at the polls requires nonpartisan resident education on the voting process and local issues to ensure residents understand what they will see on ballots and why voting matters in municipal, state, and national elections. It also requires addressing transportation, language barriers, adult literacy challenges, and ensuring that voting options accessible for people unable to take time off to vote.

Over the past seven years, the Hartford Foundation has provided more than \$1 million in grants for voter education and registration activities across Greater Hartford. In 2024, the foundation awarded nearly \$240,000 in grants to fourteen nonprofit organizations to support nonpartisan voter education and civic engagement activities leading up to the 2024 general presidential election to increase participation and encourage civic participation beyond the election and voting. Grants focused on supporting improving the ability of residents to influence government and other institutional decision-making and increasing civic trust.

Voter participation in Hartford's November 2023 municipal election was less than 15 percent of all eligible voters. Reports from our civic and resident engagement grantees in 2023 highlighted voter apathy as a factor to address in grassroots engagement, highlighting resident mistrust of the political system, lack of voter knowledge, and residents feeling their vote did not matter. According to [DataHaven's Greater Hartford Wellbeing Index](#), 63 percent of White people surveyed reported that they perceive the government to be responsive compared to 48 percent of both Black people and Latine people.

Through the foundation's grants, nonprofit organizations engaged in a variety of nonpartisan voter education and other engagement activities in Greater Hartford including conversations elevating the importance of voting and impact when people do not exercise the right to vote; development of nonpartisan voter guides on the voting process and candidates and issues on the ballot; voter registration; supports to remove barriers to voting on Election Day, such as transportation to polling locations, assistance for voters with disabilities, language barriers, or other special assistance; and sponsorship of nonpartisan candidate forums or debates for all the candidates running for a particular office.



The foundation supports the primary goals of House Bill 7242, which establishes a task force to study ways to increase voter participation in the state, with the ambitious goal of achieving 100 percent voter participation by January 1, 2030. The proposed task force is composed of 12 members, including representatives from both major political parties, legislative leaders, the Secretary of the State, and two gubernatorial appointees. The foundation recognizes the need to keep the task force membership manageable and asks legislators to consider including additional members representing nonpartisan nonprofit organizations focused on civic and voter engagement efforts.

Another approach is to have the task force invite local nonprofits active in this work, such as representatives of the [Hartford Votes/Hartford Vota Coalition](#), a nonpartisan organization whose mission is to increase voter engagement in the City of Hartford. The coalition works with many local organizations to support the work. Last April, the foundation awarded a grant to the coalition to support increasing voter participation in the 2024 presidential election and increase data-informed voter education and civic engagement in Hartford. They could share their insights into the progress they see in this work, as well as the challenges, and what else might be needed.

As we continue to see a decline in voter participation, this task force could not come at a more crucial time. It is vital to the long-term strength and stability of our state to have educated and civically engaged residents. The foundation supports the legislation's call to engage in a comprehensive investigation of strategies to enhance civic engagement, examine policies from other states that require voting as a civic duty, and assess the implementation challenges and budgetary requirements for achieving universal voter participation. The legislation requires the task force to consider recommendations for additional support needed for municipalities and other government entities engaged in this work. We strongly recommend also reviewing the work and resource needs of community-based nonprofits well positioned to engage communities of color, youth, senior or other populations. In order to effectively communicate with underrepresented voters, credible messengers have a significant role to play.

The foundation is eager to partner with legislators and advocates to support efforts to ensure that all residents have a voice on critical issues and the solutions that are responsive to and reflective of our entire community.

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.