



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning The Early Childhood Care And Education Fund

Senate Bill 0006, An Act Concerning Resources And Supports For Infants, Toddlers And Disconnected Youths

Committee on Children

March 4, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Maher, Representative Paris, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning The Early Childhood Care And Education Fund and Senate Bill 0006, An Act Concerning Resources And Supports For Infants, Toddlers And Disconnected Youths.**

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 strategic work, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase stable employment opportunities for Black and Latine adults and youth facing barriers to employment. In Greater Hartford, there are a number of good paying jobs available, but access to affordable, quality childcare remains a barrier for many working parents. The foundation's efforts focus on preparation, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment. This work includes 2Gen strategies that take a family-centered approach and considers childcare and supports for both the parents and children, allowing parents to focus on their education and job training.

One of the foundation's first workforce development efforts was the Career Pathways Initiative (CPI). It was designed to support nonprofits participating to integrate adult literacy and other education programs, support services, and career development to assist adult learners in expanding their academic and job skills and achieving self-sufficiency. CPI included an extensive evaluation of the programs and captured challenges and success of the nonprofit programs participating in the initiative. **One of the key findings was that childcare was the most frequent and costliest barrier to address.** While several of the CPI programs included some support for childcare, it ultimately remained a significant barrier to participating in training and limited employment options.

The foundation's commitment to early childhood education and related family support issues is longstanding. Ensuring that all children, especially those most vulnerable, have access to high quality early childhood experiences is a critical step to removing this barrier to employment. Since 1987, the



foundation has invested more than \$40 million in early childhood development across the Greater Hartford area. The foundation has supported early childhood policy, funding, and program quality, recognizing their importance in ensuring optimal safety and learning outcomes for children and pathways to economic security for their families and caregivers. Our collective challenge also includes significantly expanding access to quality childcare which requires building the field of providers with cultural humility in low-income communities of color. Part of our early work included convening local childcare providers to support licensing and organizational development. As part of its COVID response efforts, the foundation awarded financial support to childcare providers, including assistance in applying for federal Paycheck Protection Program funds.

According to the [2023 Greater Hartford Community Well-Being Index](#), the cost of childcare can be prohibitive. Based on 2-1-1 listings, we have estimated median price charged for full-time childcare in Greater Hartford is \$294 per week for an infant or toddler and \$250 per week for a preschool-aged child. Qualifying families use subsidized programs like Head Start or vouchers like Care 4 Kids to offset costs or rely on family members to care for their children.

The foundation supports House Bill 5003 designed to strengthen the early childhood system in Connecticut. While the foundation cannot speak to the specific funding mechanism to support these efforts, we fully endorse the legislation's recognition that there needs to be a significant, consistent and long-term state investment to support working parents as well as those in job training and needing to work. The foundation supports the bill's proposed expansion of the childcare subsidy program by raising the income eligibility threshold to 85 percent of the state-wide median income and allowing recipients to continue receiving prorated benefits until their income reaches 100 percent of the median income. Developing a thoughtful mechanism that will allow continued subsidies is essential in supporting family financial stability by helping to meet the high cost of childcare. While the need for affordable childcare is particularly important for lower income families, middle income families also struggle with affording quality care for their children which often competes with rent and mortgage payments as their greatest expense.

The foundation also supports the bill's inclusion of a competitive grant program to provide capital funding for constructing and renovating childcare facilities. We recommend the proposal clarify whether the grant program will include family childcare providers. Home-based childcare centers play a vital role in solving the shortage of childcare for infants and toddlers, care that is linguistically and culturally appropriate as well as available during non-traditional hours.

The foundation applauds this legislation's inclusion of provisions to support early childhood educators, including a subsidy program for health savings accounts and health insurance premiums and exemptions for early care and education program employees from family fee requirements in the childcare subsidy program. The foundation also supports the legislation's inclusion of assessments of provider payment rates, liability insurance costs, and the representation of men in the early childhood workforce. These combined efforts can serve to improve access to affordable, high-quality childcare and support early childhood educators in Connecticut.



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 seeks to work with government, nonprofit and other public-private partners to **increase stable employment opportunities for adults and youth in our region facing barriers to employment**. This includes addressing the needs of opportunity youth and young adults who are not in school and not working across Greater Hartford.

In 2021, The City of Hartford had 8,504 opportunity youth residing in Hartford with 37 percent identified as Hispanic/Latino and 55 percent identified as Black. Fifty-two percent of the youth identified as female, and 45 percent identified as male. Since mid-2021, youth providers report that the number of opportunity youth in Hartford overall had drastically increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in gun violence in the City of Hartford, which has disproportionately involved and impacted this youth population.

In August 2021, the Hartford Foundation partnered with the **City of Hartford, Dalio Education** announced an initial 18-month investment of \$9.85 million to support opportunity youth, who are individuals 16 – 24 who are currently disengaged from school or work. The funding was provided to [COMPASS Youth Collaborative](#), [Our Piece of the Pie](#) and [Roca, Inc.](#) to allow the experienced organizations to provide individualized, trauma-informed, high-touch support to the young people they specialize in working with, providing a continuum of services to meet the needs of youth served across the agencies.

For many years, the Hartford Foundation has also supported [basic human needs](#) of people living in the Greater Hartford region, applying an equity lens to the systems and programs that address access to food, stable housing, physical and emotional well-being.

To advance efforts to ensure children and families in our region and 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.

The foundation applauds the comprehensive approach taken in Senate Bill 0006 to provide support for children and families from birth to age five and address challenges faced by disconnected youth.

As a provider of support for basic human needs programming addressing food insecurity, the foundation recognizes the need to create more efficient systems to deliver food to those in need. The foundation supports the legislation's proposal to have the Office of Early Childhood to lead the administration of the Child and Adult Care Food Program and to encourage childcare centers and homes to participate.

The foundation also supports the proposed modification of existing programs to expand support for child nutrition outreach, including encouraging school breakfast and summer food service programs. Recognizing the vital importance of data-informed decision-making, the foundation applauds the proposed establishment of a biennial reporting requirement for the Connecticut Preschool Through Twenty and Workforce Information Network to track and analyze data on disconnected youth and



incorporate more comprehensive data from various state agencies. We recommend researchers consult with other data agencies that have been gathering data on opportunity youth.

The foundation is pleased to see that this legislation includes supports for teenage parents in communities with high teen birth rates, developing developmental screening tools, and conducting quarterly reviews of early childhood intervention programs to ensure comprehensive support for young children and their families. We recommend engaging nonprofit and other leaders doing this work to inform approaches.

Roca Inc. has worked to meet the specific needs of high-risk young people who have experienced unimaginable trauma and violence. Through Roca's Rewire CBT program—non-clinical cognitive behavioral therapy for those at the center of urban violence—Roca teaches life-saving skills to young adults ages 14-24 that help them achieve long-term behavior change and disrupt the cycle of trauma, violence, and incarceration. To build on this work, the Hartford Foundation recently awarded a two-year, \$460,000 grant to Roca to expand its Young Women's program, many of the program participants are young mothers.

The foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and businesses to eliminate barriers to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in the workforce and every family has access to quality affordable childcare.

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