



## Greater Hartford Gives Foundation Testimony on

### Senate Bill 380, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force to Support Promise Programs in the State

Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement  
March 5, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Martin, Representative Bronko and distinguished members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. The [Greater Hartford Gives Foundation](#) (formerly the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving) is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 380, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force to Support Promise Programs In the State.

The foundation commends the Committee for its leadership in creating the [Task force To Support Promise Programs](#) and the exemplary work by the task force to develop a comprehensive report and recommendations, [Creating A Connecticut Ecosystem of Promise](#).

Last year, the foundation launched the [Greater Futures Scholarship](#) program -- a transformative \$100,000 investment in Hartford Public School students as they attend four-year institution in partnership with [Hartford Promise](#). The program provides a clear path to debt-free college with expansive support services throughout high school, in college, and beyond. Like most community foundations, we have long supported traditional scholarships—and will continue to do so. But the reality is that while a \$3,000 or \$5,000 annual scholarship may alleviate some financial strain for a student, it is no longer sufficient to advance our long-term goals of increasing graduation rates and lowering post-college debt. Soaring tuition and an uncertain financial aid system demand we rethink how philanthropy supports postsecondary success. Senate Bill 380 signals that the public sector must do the same.

The Greater Futures Scholarship program acknowledges the proven effectiveness of the Promise model and the reality that scholarships have not kept pace with the escalating costs of college. We know that higher education is the key to individual success, economic mobility, and generational wealth-building. Yet the costs of college has created a student debt crisis that is hindering the future of Connecticut's young people and the prosperity of our state. Working together, public and philanthropic resources can help students to thrive in class, graduate from college debt-free, and continue to develop as leaders in their communities and as contributors to their families and Connecticut's economy. **We ask the state to join us in our commitment to providing meaningful resources for scholarships and the organizations providing wraparound supports.** This state investment in college bound students can leverage and amplify current state and public-private investments in early childhood, K-12 education, workforce, and economic revitalization. We also believe it will encourage more families to live in our cities and send their children to city schools and more young people to choose to stay in Connecticut, buy homes, and invest in their communities.

The task force recommendations offer steps to remove the persistent barriers that hold back our region's high-achieving students and prevent revitalizing the communities they call home. We encourage the committee to consider the following from the task force report:

- Supporting an Interconnected Higher Education Ecosystem - We support the task force's approach to **strengthen the ecosystem of higher education** by connecting the roles of government, philanthropic, higher education, and community-based organizations as well as the students to support an interconnected higher education ecosystem.
- Demonstrated Strength of Promise Programs - **Promise programs** provide **comprehensive strategies to expand state financial aid and wraparound supports for Connecticut students** to get to and through four-year institutions and connect to jobs. Connecticut's Promise programs vary in design to respond to local needs. All are structured to empower students to excel in their classwork, graduate from college, and continue to develop as leaders in their communities. The programs have demonstrated what students need to succeed, and what's essential to increase college enrollment, persistence, and completion. **The report documents successes to date:** Together the programs have served 5,275 students since inception supported with investments of over \$55 million; 1,850 currently in college 1,860 college graduates (from older programs in Hartford and New Haven), 1,700 internships, 275 career placements, and 250 business and nonprofit partners.
- Proposed state Investments in the Promise Programs - We also applaud the **critical state funding proposed for the four existing Promise programs and work to develop comprehensive strategies to expand state financial aid and wraparound supports for Connecticut students** to get to and through four-year institutions and connect to jobs. Promise Programs have demonstrated what students need to succeed. We strongly support the investment of \$4.8 million beginning July 1, 2026, and requiring annual grants initially based on \$3,000 per student enrolled in Promise programs, consistent with the task force report. We recommend increasing that amount over time to more closely meet current actual costs of providing comprehensive student supports of \$6,000 to \$7,000, as noted in the report. **Ensuring flexible use of state grant funding by the programs will be critical to address changing financial needs to support wraparound services and Promise scholarships to students.** The Foundation appreciates the state's partnership in supporting Hartford Promise and Connecticut's other Promise programs. We look forward to continuing to share what we are learning from our Hartford Promise investments as state leaders continue to consider additional investments.
- Coordinated Learning and Evaluation - The Foundation has commissioned a five-year evaluation of the Greater Futures Scholarship program and supports Hartford Promise in learning and evaluation. We will also learn from the enhanced data collection plan included in the legislation.
- Increased State Investments to Reduce College Debt – The bill establishes a Scholar Success Grant Program that provides an historic investment to expand state scholarships to tackle 40 percent unmet financial need among eligible Connecticut students. The new program could provide approximately \$7,000 to \$15,000 in scholarships to students based on income band assessments.

- Controlling Costs of Connecticut Four-Year Institutions - The report documents the cost of attending a four-year institution in Connecticut is 37.5 percent higher than the national average. This challenges us to look at why this is the case and explore strategies for controlling costs facing Connecticut's institutions of higher education. Increasing out-of-state and in-state student enrollment will help, but the strategy needs to limit passing costs on to students.
- Strengthening the Ecosystem and Partnership - We support the report's focus on enhancing institutional responsibility and accountability and student-centered supports. We also support the best practices in designing the state programs in the report, including broadening eligibility to support equitable access to scholarships, supporting completion, and minimizing paperwork to facilitate access for students. The state's new Scholar Success Grant Program would augment the \$41 million available through the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program. Eligible students would be able to access Promise scholarships as well. This provides the potential that students would manage less debt. It is a good start. We will want to coordinate how to monitor how different eligibility requirements can support reaching more students as resources increase.
- Support Statewide Infrastructure for Postsecondary Success - We encourage the Committee to consider the existing experience and infrastructure to support scholarships at community foundations across the state and look forward to exploring how a new Office of Postsecondary Success can build on and leverage this work.

We recommend the Committee and stakeholders **continue developing strategies to significantly reduce student loan debt** to make college more accessible and affordable, and financial security and economic mobility achievable.

In addition, we strongly recommend **establishing a regular formal mechanism to learn from Promise and other college bound students and graduates to ground and guide the work**. Yavi Cartagena, a 2025 Hartford Promise Scholar first generation college student who supports her mom in caring for her younger siblings and plans to become a pediatrician said, "And throughout the college process, all I could think about was the cost and how we would manage our finances. Every number worried me. I wasn't worried about the academics – I know I can handle that." Students provide an essential perspective on what is most helpful at various stages as they complete high school, attend college, and pursue careers after graduation.

The Greater Hartford Gives Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, philanthropy, nonprofits, advocates, and businesses to address barriers to higher education and employment and ensure that all residents have an opportunity to reach their potential and attain economic stability, thrive, and contribute to Connecticut's economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@greaterhartfordgives.org](mailto:policy@greaterhartfordgives.org) or 860-548-1888.