



Greater Hartford Gives Foundation Testimony on

Senate Bill 401, An Act Concerning A Bridge Program To Allow Access To Food, Housing And Health Care Benefits

Appropriations Committee

March 12, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Somers, Representative Nuccio and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. The [Greater Hartford Gives Foundation](#) (formerly the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving) is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **Senate Bill 401, An Act Concerning A Bridge Program To Allow Access To Food, Housing And Health Care Benefits. We support this proposal's goal to develop a state program to maintain access to essential services including food, healthcare, employment assistance, and housing for Connecticut's most vulnerable residents, including veterans, people at risk or experiencing homelessness, youth aging out of foster care, individuals with autism, and people aged 55 to 64 who are at risk of losing federal benefits.**

Senate Bill 401 would provide critical support for thousands of Connecticut residents negatively impacted by the reduction in federal support and new eligibility requirements as a result of the passage and implementation of Public Law 119-21, known as the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act." The proposed bill calls upon the Commissioner of Social Services to collaborate with the Commissioners of Aging and Disability Services, Children and Families, Housing, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Labor to develop a comprehensive transitional bridge program to provide state-funded medical assistance, nutrition assistance, supportive housing and employment assistance.

The state is facing complex challenges which require a collaborative, holistic approach to prepare for and manage current and future changes to major federal assistance programs. Given changes in federal policy in implementing SNAP, Medicaid, and supportive housing, and other public benefit programs, the proposed legislation would help to ensure that thousands of residents are protected from a loss of services and supports they rely upon.

The program aims to provide state-funded medical, nutrition, housing, and employment assistance to vulnerable residents who may lose federal aid due to changes in federal work requirements in Public Law 119-21 and proposed changes by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Commissioner of Social Services, in collaboration with other state commissioners, must develop a plan by October 1, 2026, which will supplement existing job support programs, provide transitional state-funded assistance equivalent to what would have been received under federal programs. The collaborative work also includes recommending long-term housing solutions including an inventory of state property for housing and requires uniform documentation of employability to potentially secure federal waivers for work requirements. The plan, along with funding needs and an implementation timeline, must be submitted to the General Assembly by January 1, 2027. The legislation's focus on interagency collaboration recognizes that the challenges related to accessing benefits often present interrelated issues and services often engage overlapping vulnerable populations needing food, housing



and medical assistance. The challenge of diminished federal support across a range of programming to meet Connecticut resident's basic needs and support wellness requires a coordinated and systemic response that addresses the challenges people face in finding and sustaining services for themselves and their families. The foundation applauds the legislation's recognition that state agencies addressing basic human needs work together to create an ecosystem of support.

The foundation commends the proposed collaborative work across key state agencies to develop both strategies to prevent Connecticut vulnerable residents from losing federal benefits and meet program requirements and work to develop sustainable housing solutions now and for the future. This work would augment other ongoing efforts to prevent homelessness and address the need for adequate affordable housing in Connecticut and the legislation's focus on providing support for people transitioning from permanent supportive housing programs eliminated by the federal government.

The vulnerable populations included in the legislation meant to be illustrative. We recommend making clear that the work would include people with managing a range of mental health disorders as well as young adults who are out of school, justice system involved, as well as aging out of foster care, recognizing these residents are often overlapping populations in need of securing and sustaining benefits.

Since 1925, the Greater Hartford Gives Foundation has proudly served as the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. Last year, the foundation celebrated 100 years of service and remains committed to building an even greater Hartford region. Over the past two years, we have distributed more than \$115 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, Greater Hartford Gives supports [basic human needs](#) in our region by ensuring food security, reducing homelessness, and expanding access to health care. This work recognizes that longstanding systems and practices are challenged to meet people's most basic human needs. Through our investments, we have seen that when essential needs are met, people are better able to achieve stability and other goals.

We support nonprofits working to reduce homelessness, food insecurity, and helping to improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of Greater Hartford residents, prioritizing Black and Latine residents who are disproportionately impacted by structural racism and bias. Our grantmaking helps to strengthen the local and regional safety net and ensure people have the stability necessary to participate in education, the workforce, and their community. We also support activities that increase the coordination among basic needs providers, and the responsiveness of local and state agencies.

The foundation's basic human needs strategies intersect with our [Employment Opportunities](#) investments where we have seen connections to food, housing, and other wraparound supports are essential in supporting people in persisting in job training as well as securing and sustaining employment.

Through our grantmaking and broader work with nonprofits, 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 families have access to food.

We want to share what we are learning from the research supported by the foundation and work with nonprofit providers supporting the basic needs of the families they serve.

As a member of the Connecticut Urban Opportunity Collaborative (CUOC), a partnership among Greater Hartford Gives, The [Community Foundation for Greater New Haven](#), and [Fairfield County's Community Foundation](#), the foundation has invested in [UpTogether](#) to launch a multi-regional Direct Cash Assistance Pilot Program to promote social and economic mobility while studying the impact of cash assistance in Connecticut. The pilot program is designed to support 120 leaders from Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport who are facing economic hardship and collaborating to build community power and improve their lives and neighborhoods. Over three years, participant households will receive monthly payments totaling \$12,600 to help alleviate financial challenges and foster community improvements. A growing body of evidence from the many direct cash programs operating across the country demonstrate that direct cash can lead to increased food security, improved health, more stable employment and housing, and increased family incomes and savings.

According to [Feeding America](#), more than 516,000 (1 in 7) Connecticut residents struggle with hunger; more than 122,000 (1 in 6) children are food insecure. Child hunger has risen, with rates reaching up to 25 percent in cities like Hartford and New Haven. The food insecurity crisis among children can lead to developmental delays, mental health issues, and physical illnesses.

The [Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity's State of Food Insecurity in Connecticut 2025 Report](#) found that the overall state of food security in Connecticut has significantly worsened and that will likely continue in the coming years without significant intervention. Connecticut has passed Maine for the highest food insecurity rate in New England.

For many years, **the foundation has provided annual grants to address basic human needs (totaling approximately \$8 million this past year) to support regional and local nonprofit agencies in providing direct services and addressing systemic challenges.** Our grants tackle a range of related issues, including food security and healthy food choices and other supports for wellness.

These grants include the foundation's annual **Basic Human Needs Emergency Assistance grants** where more than 60 percent of funding supports food assistance. Last year, \$755,000 was granted by the foundation to 70 nonprofits, including faith-based and mutual aid organizations received Emergency Assistance grants. These grants prioritized nonprofits that serve neighborhoods and towns with a higher percentage of residents living in poverty and sought 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 and lack of access to health services without state investments to mitigate federal SNAP reductions and in free food programs in public schools where access to food is essential. **The foundation supports the proposed legislation's provisions to invest state dollars for transitional state-funded medical assistance and nutrition assistance.**

Each year, the foundation has also awarded approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit organizations that provide access to emergency shelter, warming centers, housing subsidies, case management,



eviction prevention and other services to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The foundation's investments also include smaller annual emergency assistance grants made to proximate organizations providing urgent food, clothing, financial assistance (i.e., rent and utility expenses).

As critical is our support of work to address systemic barriers to quality, stable, affordable housing, including the [Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network](#) and the policy agenda of [CT CAN End Homelessness](#).

Collaboration across agencies requires a great deal of work to make the effort work. We ask that the Committee consider including adequate funding to administer the program, including support for communications to alert the public and to work with the populations to be served to ensure they understand and can meet requirements.

The foundation applauds Senate Bill 401's efforts to supplement existing state job support programs including those administered by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the Jobs First Employment Services program for recipients of temporary family assistance, and other employment services offered by the state Labor Department for veterans and other vulnerable persons to help them meet federal work requirements.

Through our own investments in workforce development, we have seen how many residents have been challenged to find work for which they are qualified. The imposition of new work requirements for eligibility for Medicaid and SNAP will not change the fact that there simply are not enough jobs to hire all of those who need to satisfy the 80-hour a month work requirement. The foundation supports the proposal's creation of uniform documentation of employability of vulnerable persons receiving employment assistance for the purposes of submission to the federal government for potential federal waivers of work requirements.

At a time when costs for basic needs including food, housing, and healthcare continue to rise, while access to jobs has become increasingly more challenging, Senate Bill 401 represents a thoughtful, compassionate response to severe federal cutbacks in vital programs that support Connecticut's most vulnerable residents. The state can and must do all it can to mitigate the damage caused by these proposed changes to federal programming and this legislation speaks to need for the state to act decisively.

The Greater Hartford Gives Foundation is ready to partner with legislators, state government leaders, philanthropy, advocates, and other stakeholders to ensure that all residents have the resources they need to thrive. 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.