



## Greater Hartford Gives Foundation Testimony on

### House Bill 5001, An Act Concerning Absentee Voting For All And Various Other Reforms To The Administration Of Elections

### Senate Bill 395, An Act Studying Efforts To Increase Voter Participation And Authorizing Municipal Pilot Programs To Promote Such Efforts

## Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 13, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. The [Greater Hartford Gives Foundation](#) (formerly the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving) is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony on **House Bill 5001, An Act Concerning Absentee Voting For All And Various Other Reforms To The Administration Of Elections and Senate Bill 395, An Act Studying Efforts To Increase Voter Participation And Authorizing Municipal Pilot Programs To Promote Such Efforts**. We support the legislature's efforts to promote and nurture civic engagement and ensure that all eligible Connecticut residents can 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. We recognize that voter education and participation are central to an inclusive, vibrant democracy.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latine residents in the region we serve, Greater Hartford Gives 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." 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 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 presidential elections, from 63 percent in 2016, to 50 percent in 2020, to only 43 percent in 2024.

In 2025 municipal elections, which tend to have significantly lower turnout, statewide, voter participation was about 35.9 percent compared to 33.7 percent in the municipal elections in 2023. In 2025, more than 777,000 voters cast ballots on Election Day, during early voting or via an absentee ballot out of the state's about 2.1 million registered voters. In 2023, a total of nearly 742,000 voters cast a ballot in the municipal election, out of the 2.2 million eligible registered voters registered.

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.

Over the past eight years, Greater Hartford Gives 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.

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 there are voting options accessible for people unable to take time off to vote. The foundation encourages the committee to continue its ongoing efforts to find effective tools to more effectively engage Connecticut residents and remove barriers to participation in the electoral process.

**The foundation offers its support for House Bill 5001's efforts to remove statutory restrictions on eligibility for absentee voting to ensure that all eligible Connecticut voters have access to the ballot box.** We appreciate that the legislation balances ensuring accessible voting and safeguards. This includes the legislation authorizing the Secretary of the State to recommend changes to procedures for in-person voter registration to make it easier for disabled individuals to participate in the electoral process. The foundation also applauds the proposal allowing seventeen-year-olds who will attain the age of eighteen by the day of an election to vote early or by absentee helping young voters eager to start participating in our democracy. Ensuring that young voters can vote when first eligible we believe can motivate regular voting.

The foundation recognizes that civic participation, including voting, as one of the most important ways for people to weigh in on local and national issues affecting our lives. According to [research](#) from the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#), 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 to advance collective action on community issues they identify.** The foundation and its partners recognize that it is vital that policy decisions are informed by a diverse group of residents impacted by the actions in city halls, town councils and at the State Capitol.

**The foundation supports Senate Bill 395's establishment of task force to study ways to increase voter participation to one hundred percent by January 1, 2030, and to enhance civic engagement in the state.** Through our own grantmaking to support voter registration and voter engagement, we recognize that many perspective voters face real barriers to voting and often do not see how voting impacts their lives. These



obstacles make it challenging to attain one hundred percent participation, but the foundation recognizes the value of having ambitious goals.

**The foundation supports the legislation's call for a task force to examine policies from other jurisdictions that could promote greater voter participation. The examination would include jurisdictions that require citizens to vote, identifying implementation options, needs of election officials, and necessary state and municipal funding. The foundation supports exploring the idea of universal voting to examine best practices and impact data from jurisdictions implementing it, particularly communities that look like ours. Based on the foundation's investments in this civic and resident engagement, we suggest continuing a cautious, informed approach to voting mandates. We recognize the need for adequate resources to support extensive public education, outreach and supports to make voting easily accessible for all eligible Connecticut voters.** The foundation recommends that the membership of the task force include representation from the Secretary of State's Office as well as representatives of organizations engaged in voter outreach and education work who have firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities that exist in engaging more residents in the electoral process. It might be worthwhile to convene a group of smaller, community-based organizations to inform the recommendations of the task force. They have insight on why eligible voters are not participating in elections, including why some do not see how their vote matters.

**The foundation also supports the intent of the bill to empower municipalities to establish pilot programs, to promote the goal of one hundred percent voter participation, which can include voter outreach and education campaigns. It encourages municipalities to test new approaches within their resources.** We recognize, however, that some municipalities are struggling with inadequate funding to implement current voting processes and other responsibilities. The lack of new state resources to support this work may limit the ability of communities to test ideas that expand voter participation .

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.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfg.org](mailto:policy@hfg.org) or 860-548-1888.