



**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of
Retaining Executive Order 12D and the Governor's Recommendation Regarding FEMA Funding for
Non-congregate Housing**

**Public Health Committee
February 8, 2022**

Good afternoon, Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **retaining the Governor's Executive Order 12D with some modifications as well as retaining Governor Lamont's recommendation regarding FEMA funding for non-congregate housing.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets. Over the past two years, the Foundation distributed a record-breaking \$97 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 \$894 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance equity in social and economic mobility in Greater Hartford's Black and Latinx communities, the Hartford Foundation seeks to **increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods.** Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime, and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

The Foundation is supporting residents by increasing the opportunities in Hartford neighborhoods and by increasing the ability of Hartford residents to choose to move to other higher opportunity areas throughout Greater Hartford. The Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

COVID has reinforced the need for all of us to live in safe, stable homes, in safe, stable neighborhoods, in safe, stable communities. To support this work, the Foundation is member of HOMEConnecticut, a broad-based campaign working to address Connecticut's affordable housing shortage with the goal to **ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to a range of affordable housing choices in all communities in the state.**

Public commitment must address the interplay of basic human needs, including access to food, mental and physical health care services, housing and other needs, and provide adequate support to the nonprofit organizations providing these services.

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The Foundation applauds the response of the Lamont Administration to the pandemic housing crisis and their efforts to listen to residents and housing advocates to help ensure the effective administration of the UniteCT program. This response has prevented thousands of residents from losing their homes.

We are concerned that the expiration of Executive Order 12D on February 15 puts the efficacy of the UniteCT program at risk. The provisions in Executive Order 12D protect not only new applicants, but also tenants and landlords whose applications are pending. Since the Department of Housing (DOH) does not expect to finish disbursing the currently available UniteCT funds until this summer, extending this order would ensure that individuals and families with pending applications will not be evicted while they wait for DOH to complete the process. We know that almost all of the funds in the UniteCT budget have been committed, but almost half of it – nearly \$200,000,000 – has yet to be disbursed. If the emergency order expires, it is expected that new applications to the program will be paused. In addition, DOH has applied for additional federal funds and it is possible that a modest amount may yet be received before the program closes.

We urge the legislature to retain Executive order 12D or codify the order in modified form. We support the language offered by HOMEConnecticut to accomplish this, including:

Pay the landlord and keep tenants in place: It is vital to prevent landlords who will be paid under UniteCT from evicting a tenant while waiting for a UniteCT payment. Therefore, HOMEConnecticut proposes stays of evictions of tenants with pending UniteCT completed applications until the landlord is paid (or the application is denied). A paid landlord is required by UniteCT to withdraw the eviction.

Suspend tenant protections tied to UniteCT applications rather than terminate them: With suspensions of new applications expected to occur on or about February 15, HOMEConnecticut proposes to maintain that 12D requirements related to new applications should not be terminated, because UniteCT may receive further funding, thus they may again become applicable. These protections should be suspended during periods when new applications are not being accepted and automatically spring back when applications are being accepted.

Preserve 30-day duration of notice to quit: This proposal would preserve, for the duration of the payout period, the 30-day notice to quit with a right to cure. Even without UniteCT, a 30-day cure period gives tenants with a small amount due a chance to get caught up. For tenants who must vacate, whether the State of Emergency is formally extended or not, the reality is that the pandemic has made it extremely difficult for evicted tenants to find a new apartment quickly. Early return to a 3-day notice to quit will be damaging to tenants.

Sunset Provision: This provision terminates the proposal when UniteCT has paid out all funds.

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These proposals preserve the core purpose of UniteCT, which is to minimize the spread of COVID that results from the eviction of tenants, while paying landlords who are owed back rent. This approach also self-adapts to what is essentially a phase-out of the UniteCT program. It is keyed into two specific events for which the explicit dates are not yet known: (1) the date that UniteCT stops accepting applications, and (2) the date that all UniteCT payments have been made. Thus, the relevant provisions of EO 12D will remain in effect when they are most applicable and will be suspended when they are not. Ultimately, all of these protections would end when UniteCT no longer has funds.

The Foundation also urges the legislature **to support the Governor's recommendation regarding FEMA funding for non-congregate housing** which would continue the declaration of the public health and civil preparedness emergencies, as several federal funding sources are contingent on this continuation. This includes FEMA coverage of 100 percent of non-congregate housing sources. These resources have been critical in ensuring that our residents experiencing housing instability are able to remain safely housed during the ongoing public health crisis.

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut families have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfp.org or 860-548-1888.

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