

2016 Agenda to Enrich the Lives of Urban Residents and Employers

The strength of our state depends on the
strength of our cities.

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A number of factors point to the critical need for the state of Connecticut to realign its priorities and focus on the long-term solvency of this great state. The state is at a critical juncture. Economic growth is non-existent, when adjusted for inflation the annual real hourly earnings of private sector employees has dropped 6.6% since 2007¹, companies are considering relocation, taxpayers are moving out of the state quicker than they are moving in, recent budgets have resulted in deficits and harmful cuts to programs that in many cases serve the most vulnerable, and we yet again face a \$4 billion deficit. We as state lawmakers need to either have the courage to change the state or choose to limp forward down this path of deficit after deficit and significant tax increase after significant tax increase. I believe we should responsibly acknowledge the facts and take appropriate steps to make necessary corrective actions. The time for action is now. Continuing to do the same thing in hopes of a different outcome is unsuitable not only with regards to human compassion but also in terms of dollars expended by the state.

According to the Office of Fiscal Analysis, approximately one-quarter, or 25.3% of the \$20 billion budget is consumed by health and human services expenditures. These appropriations however are increasingly 'crowded out' by the ever growing expense of state government overhead including but not limited to state employees. Often it is health and human services expenditures that are unilaterally reduced in tough budget times, resulting in critical services not being provided and compounding the issues faced by those who rely on these services. We need proactive steps to reduce expenditures not by nipping at the services, but by empowering people to become economically free from the state.

The multitude of barriers to economic freedom and success in our urban communities are staggering. Despite our significant pockets of wealth, poverty statewide continues to plague our state at 11.3% in 2013. The unemployment rate, while falling, continues to exceed the national average. While the state's unemployment rate hovered just under 8%, Hartford's unemployment rate was 23.1% in 2013 up from 20.0% in 2010 and 13.7% in 2007. Of those unemployed in Hartford, 58.2% of them are between the ages of 16-19 years old and 26.2% of them are between 20-24 years old. Many of these individuals are Black and Hispanic men.

To put the following statistics in perspective, the poverty level for a family of two is \$15,930. This level increases to \$24,250 for a family of four. An astonishing 33.6% of Hartford's residents live in poverty. While lower at 26.5% in New Haven and 23.3% in Bridgeport these figures are still a significant cause for concern.² Connecticut's hunger rate holds steady and the number of recipients for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the food stamp program) reached a staggering 405,343 in June 2015, up 251,367 people from October 2009.

In Hartford, an estimated 17,443 children under the age of 18 are living in a household led by a female with no husband present.³ Statewide 64,000 or 8% of children under the age of 18 are

¹ *Waiting for Wage Growth*, March 2015, Governing Magazine

² Please see Appendix A for details on urban poverty rates

³ 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey

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living in a household in which the head of household does not have a high school diploma.⁴ We need to acknowledge that the barriers realized by these families are not borne by just the head of the household. There is a multi-generational problem that will continue to repeat itself in the future if we allow these trends to continue. The cycle must be broken.

We believe:

- The livelihood of our state is dependent on the livelihood of our cities.
- We need to create broad prosperity that makes it easy for people to find living-wage jobs.
- We need to assist those without the training or skill-set to get these jobs.
- We need to help children and families move out of poverty.

Embracing the multi-faceted approach detailed in this agenda is not only the compassionate response to the issues confronting our cities; it is also the most fiscally conservative approach to such challenges. The state needs high impact, low cost solutions to immediate problems. A recent 2013 report by the Cato Institute found that the maximum value of welfare benefits that are available to individuals in our state is the fourth most generous in the country totaling \$38,761⁵. Even more striking is the pre-tax equivalent of this total package which is \$44,370 annually or \$21.33 per hour.⁶ This means that in order for a single mother to give up her state and federal assistance to take a job (assuming that she is indeed receiving the entire package available to her) she will need to make at least \$21.33 to break-even. It is therefore understandable that individuals on assistance can't afford to leave the system without economic harm to their family. As a result, that person's potential is hampered.

When asked to compile their own estimate for the total package of welfare benefits available in the State of Connecticut, the non-partisan Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) estimated such value at \$35,642 not including the Woman, Infants and Children (WIC) program valued at approximately \$1,253. When including the WIC benefit to the OFA estimate the total increases to \$36,895, just \$1,866 less than the Cato Institute estimate. There are a few obvious caveats when utilizing such data. First, not all individuals receive the total package of benefits available to them. Second, this level of assistance is not available for adults without dependents. Third, not all of the assistance provided is in the form of cash. That being said, the poverty trap this exercise is focused on is very real and is debilitating to those individuals trapped within it.

Studies continually reinforce the fact that children that grow up in poverty are likely to end up in poverty as well. Sociologist Patrick Sharkey performed numerous studies of urban neighborhoods and found that the consequences of "multi-generational exposure to concentrated poverty in neighborhoods of considerable violence, unemployment, single parenthood, environmental degradation, and hopelessness" is profound and results in

⁴ Kids Count Data Center

⁵ Michael Tanner and Charles Hughes, *The Work Versus Welfare Trade-Off: 2013 An Analysis of the Total Level of Welfare Benefits by State*, 2013, page 4.

⁶ Ibid, page 8.

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continued poverty, lower academic and educational performance, and reduced labor-force participation.⁷

The success of the recommendations contained in this policy agenda will result not only in greater financial independence of families currently plagued by poverty, but will also result in a strengthened fiscal trajectory for the state of Connecticut. While many of the programs that were tallied up by the Cato Institute and OFA are at least in some part federally funded, there is still a large sum of money that the state expends annually for its share of program costs. For instance, in fiscal year 2016 the state appropriated a total of \$3.2 billion to the Department of Social Services (DSS) alone. Of this amount, \$2.5 billion is for the state's share of the Medicaid program. OFA estimates that in fiscal year 2022 the Medicaid program will cost the state \$3.2 billion, jumping to \$4.1 billion in fiscal year 2027. Overall DSS expenditures totaling \$4 billion in fiscal year 2022 will increase by \$1 billion just 5 years later to \$5 billion in fiscal year 2027.

Similar to overly-generous state employee benefits, these types of expenditures cannot reasonably be supported by state taxpayers or employers. This reality is reinforced when considering the compounding generational phenomenon of poverty together with the state's aging population and the fact that more people are moving out of our state than are moving in. When there are less people to pay and less tax revenue coming in, those that really need the assistance will be left without if this cycle is not broken and if people cannot get the tools that they need to succeed in life independently.

Smart, compassionate, focused reforms can change the state's fiscal path significantly. This is the year to enact such reforms. The state needs to move past year after year after year of deficits and step into the 2017 legislative session on better financial footing. After all, the projected \$1.8 billion biennial deficit for fiscal year 2018 and fiscal year 2019 will only continue to grow with time and the people who are left in poverty will only realize more hardship. Something has to change.

There are six goals of this holistic policy recommendation. They are:

1. Decreased unemployment and therefore a reduction in the poverty rate.
2. Justice reforms.
3. Development of viable communities with a reduction in blight and a simultaneous increase in municipal grand lists.
4. Bringing our educational opportunities in line with the twenty-first century by creating additional opportunities to succeed without attending college.
5. Engagement of local residents resulting in enhanced social capital and activism, thereby allowing members of the community to work together to solve problems within the community.

⁷ Richard Rothstein, *The Urban Poor Shall Inherit Poverty*, January 7, 2014, <http://Prospect.org/article/urban-poor-shall-inherit-poverty>

6. Reduction in the cost and scope of current social service programs as a result of increased employment and enhanced self-sufficiency, thereby reducing Connecticut's out-year deficits.

Decreased Unemployment

Provide Ladder for Individual Independence

Policy – To remove the disincentive to securing a job for very low-income Connecticut families.

Temporary Family Assistance Component

- The Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program provides cash assistance, generally up to 21 months, to very low-income families with children. Unless exempt (for example, the caretaker relative is incapacitated), adults in the household must participate in a work-related activity (work, job search, job search skills training) for the family to receive assistance.
- Currently, an individual can get a job while receiving Temporary Family Assistance and still receive cash benefits up to the federal poverty level (FPL). Once the family's earned income reaches the FPL, the family becomes ineligible for assistance.
- Given the significant dollar value of supports that Connecticut provides to low-income families as discussed in the summary section of this proposal, one can logically deduce that there is a disincentive for individuals to actually take a job while on TANF. If they did take a job, they could very easily end up with less money to support their family than if they were receiving the full complement of state assistance.
- This proposal seeks to accelerate the entry into the workforce by increasing the amount that the family can receive when they do secure a job within the first 21 months while receiving TFA assistance from 100% of FPL to 150% of FPL. This additional payment would continue for an additional 12 months. For a family of three this would mean that perhaps the single, working mother with two children would be allowed to receive assistance up to \$30,135 for the remainder of their 21 month period, instead of being cut off with wages of \$20,090.

One-Time Benefit for Those that Timed Out from TFA Benefits

- Every month an average of 156 clients stop receiving TFA due to time limits. What do these 1,872 families do to support themselves and break the cycle of poverty? Do they continue to receive all state and federal support that they can get and become despondent to ever changing their life trajectory?
- The state needs to attempt one last effort to incentivize these individuals to get up and actively seek employment.

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- This proposal entails a new state funded program that would incentivize an individual with a one-time \$1,000 bonus if they timed out on their TFA benefits and found a job.

Unemployment Compensation Component

- Similar to the TFA benefit, this proposal allows those that are receiving unemployment compensation to get a full-time job and still receive from the state a payment that makes up the difference between the unemployment compensation and their job wages.
- Due to federal regulations, the subsidized payment to the individual cannot come from the Unemployment Trust Fund so this proposal would establish a new pot of money separate and distinct from unemployment compensation whereas the individual would receive the subsidized payment for the duration of the 26 week maximum entitlement unemployment compensation period.

Enact a Graduated Phase-out under Care4Kids

- Currently, a family can receive child care subsidies until their income hits 50% of the state median income (SMI). This maximum income in our state is \$24,030 for a family of two and \$53,097 for a family of four.
- The federal government has recently enacted changes to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Connecticut will have to make modifications to our current Care4Kids program in order to comply with federal changes and will need to submit a plan for such modifications to the feds for approval by March 1, 2016.
- This proposal recommends that the state Office of Early Childhood amend the state program to allow for a graduated phaseout as now allowed by the federal government. According to the Federal Register, new statutory language would allow families to continue to receive child care subsidies until their family income exceeds 85% of SMI which is \$61,379 for a family of two and \$90,264 for a family of four.
- This modification will alleviate the current problem of families being penalized with immediately assuming the significant cost of child care while they are attempting to make their families more financially secure with increased wages.

Expand Multigenerational Programming in the State

Policy – To break the cycle of poverty in our state. The expansion of this poorly-funded program will give needed resources to the working poor that desire to achieve a college degree in hope of finding a path to self-sufficiency.

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- Evidence strongly supports that a child's education and general life trajectory will follow that of his/her parents. More than 46% of Connecticut children live in families whose highest educational degree is a high school diploma or less.⁸
- The Connecticut Workforce Advancement Grants for Education (CT WAGE) and Women in Transition (WIT) programs are currently administered by the Board of Regents. These programs provide assistance to low-income working parents to help them to complete their college degrees. Both programs provide assistance such as laptops, text books, funds for course costs not covered by financial aid, and career counseling. While both programs help low-income parents, WIT specifically targets its services to minority, low-income, single mothers.
- The parents participating in this program will receive a career coach to guide them as they work their way through different career-based academic tracks. The program's wraparound support will enable parents to break the cycle of poverty while promoting a productive lifestyle for children.
- The current CT WAGE and WIT programs are solely funded through philanthropic resources and are provided for those that attend Charter Oak State College. In Fiscal Year 2015 there was only \$71,767 available for both of these programs which provided services to 78 students. The success of these small programs is evident by their high retention rates which are 89% for the WIT program and 85% for the CT Wage program.
- Currently all public constituent units of higher education must make a 15% statutorily required contribution for need-based scholarships. This proposal would require that these units spend at least 2% of the 15% for each of these programs, thereby reserving a modest 4% (2% for CT WAGE and 2% for WIT) for these purposes.
- In the 2015-2016 academic year the projected University of Connecticut set-aside was \$68.5 million, the State University set-aside was \$24.7 million and the Technical College System set-aside was \$18.7 million. Using this as an illustration, a total of \$4.48 million would have been available for these programs under this proposal in that academic year.

Justice Reforms

Provide Automatic Erasure of Drug Misdemeanors

Policy – To remove barriers to employment.

- The country's drug problem has left many capable individuals unemployable or underemployed due to their previous poor decisions with regard to drug use. There is no reason why someone that has been rehabilitated for an extended period of time cannot be given the opportunity to obtain a clean record which will assist them and

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<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/8/5043,7244,43,7188,7245,5062,5116,5119,5203,6795,106,5425,7249,7243,7246,7247,7248,7250/compared,single>

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their families as they move forward. Currently, it can take as many as two years to get a pardon from the Board of Pardons and Paroles. Further, the percentage of pardons granted is low. Having a conviction on your record hampers your ability to market yourself and get a good paying job to support yourself and your family. This recommendation entails providing an automatic erasure of non-violent misdemeanor drug convictions after an individual has been clean for five years and has no other arrests during said period of time. Providing a clean slate provides greater opportunity for individual employment success and should help reduce the unemployment rate for those that might be classified as undesirable by employers.

- Current state law requires an individual to wait 3 years after the date of disposition for a misdemeanor conviction and 5 years after the date of disposition for a felony conviction before they can apply for a full or provisional pardon.

Eliminate Bond Requirements for Non-Violent Drug Offenses

Policy – Reduce unnecessary expenditures by the Department of Corrections.

- Pre-trial inmates in the State of Connecticut that have either been denied bail or have not had the opportunity financially to post bail are maintained by the State Department of Corrections.
- It is conceivable that for some families securing \$300 to get their loved one out of jail for a routine, non-violent, non-selling drug offense is simply not a possibility. As a result, an individual may wait in jail for a significant period of time for trial. This time spent in jail equates to tax dollars being spent on an individual that has little flight risk and for whom their offense may be considered minor as compared to the cost of this interim incarceration.
- This proposal seeks to entirely eliminate bond requirements for non-violent drug offenses that are not related to the selling of drugs.

Development of Viable Communities

Problem Property Development Incentive 7/7 Program

Policy – With no cost to state taxpayers, these recommendations seek to incentivize developers to remediate brownfield sites by giving them the financial incentive to do so along with predictability with regards to the timing for approval and certainty with regards to the timing of financial incentives.

- For blighted property that has been abandoned or underutilized for at least 10 years as verified by the municipality, this proposal seeks to provide a state tax incentive package as follows:

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- For contaminated and non-contaminated property the employer will receive 100% exemption from the state income, sales and use, or corporation business taxes generated at the revitalized property for 7 years.
- For contaminated property the employer will also be able to deduct 60% of the cost to remediate the property over the 7 years following the 7 year 100% tax exemption. This deduction in years 8-14 of this program would be applied against the state income, sales and use, or corporation business taxes and would be equally distributed across those years.
- An additional benefit proposed to incentivize the remediation of contaminated property is to require that municipalities assess the property at the same level as when it was contaminated for the 5 years following the date when the property owner pulls the building permit to begin construction on the property in question.
- Under this initiative, a Licensed Environmental Professional (LEP) must certify that the property in question is a brownfield according to state statute. After clean-up work is complete, the LEP must then certify that the property was remediated. This certification must be provided to the Department of Revenue Services as well as the municipality in which the property is located. In addition, the certification must be recorded on the property's land records.
- This benefit can only be received by a company if they agree to submit to area high schools and to the community technical college system the anticipated workforce needs along with projected job requirements to allow these entities to develop and tailor curriculum specific for their organization. In addition, the company must certify that it will hire 30% of their total workforce from the local community through the programs that were developed specifically for that company.
- If enacted, the General Assembly would need to include some kind of recapture provision to safeguard the state if the land is sold within the first seven years of development.
- Modifications are also recommended to the recently enacted Brownfield Remediation Tax Credit program. This program, which is currently funded with \$20 million annually, contains many of the same hurdles that developers currently face with other brownfield programs. Under the current program, there is no predictability for the developer who may be interested in remediating and developing a non-defunct brownfield site. Therefore, we are recommending that applications for participation in this program be acted on within 90 days after submission or they are deemed approved.

21st Century Education

Pipeline for Connecticut's Future

Policy – Receiving a bachelor's degree is no longer a guarantee that one will be employed upon graduation. In fact, 37% of those that graduate with a bachelor's degree are underemployed six years after they received said degree.⁹ This homegrown program will provide a double benefit for the State of Connecticut. It will allow companies to fill vacant positions in their workforce with an employee trained specifically for that job while providing direct employment opportunities for Connecticut youth as well promoting entrepreneurship among high school students.

- This proposed program would provide a direct pipeline of qualified employees for any company by incentivizing local school districts to develop partnerships with local businesses and develop curriculum to train high school students specifically for the business community's needs upon graduation.
- This program will be modeled after the initiative that is currently underway in towns like Wallingford and the Platt Technical High School in Milford where local manufacturers are working collaboratively with the superintendent of schools in their joint effort to get kids that may not be interested in attending college to graduate with a specific, manufacturing related career path in mind and ultimately to be employed by the participating companies. The programs entail both industry-specific class time as well as cooperative work placements. In addition to the work performed at the local high schools, these programs also provide incubator space for entrepreneurs to work collaboratively and innovatively with students.
- While the Wallingford and Platt programs are geared specifically towards manufacturing, it is imperative to educate towards a certificate statewide. Whether it is manufacturing, computer programming, auto mechanic, culinary arts, etc. students should graduate from high school with not only a diploma but also either a certificate or with skillsets necessary to begin a career. The Connecticut Technical High Schools are beyond capacity and currently have a waitlist of over 3,000 students for 9th grade. This is unacceptable. Not all children want to or can afford to go to college. Young adults should be acquiring the skills that they need to support themselves and eventually a family. All public high schools should have technical classes and programming available for its students. Given the number of forward-thinking students that are already seeking career education at the high school level, it is really a disservice to the kids and the state that all schools do not offer such programs.

Expanded Open Choice

Policy – To expand the educational opportunities for children in our state.

⁹ Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University

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- It is currently voluntary for local school districts to provide intradistrict open choice programs for their residents.
- This initiative requires municipalities to provide open choice to residents so that if there is a lower performing neighborhood school that a parent does not want to send their child to they can choose another school in district for their child's education.
- When a school loses 20% of their children to another school, the state will incentivize teachers to work at the lower-performing school with enhanced salaries. In addition, the state will research and determine the top three reasons why that particular public school has lost such a significant amount of "local" children, thereby allowing the school administrators and teachers to effectively map out a plan for improvement.

Remarket the Existing Community School Program

Policy – To encourage a ground-up approach to solving perceived educational issues in a community.

- Current state law allows local or regional board of educations to establish a community school which is a public school that participates in a coordinated, community-based effort with community partners to provide comprehensive educational and wrap-around services to students and families. This proposal seeks to expand the marketing of this program as it may prove to be a useful tool in increasing community empowerment.

Social Capital

In the past five years over \$6.0 billion of state taxpayer revenue has been provided to the cities of Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Waterbury. During this same time period, the poverty rate has continued to climb and food stamp utilization in the state has increased by approximately 60,000. The city of Hartford which alone received close to 33%, or \$2.0 billion of the \$6.0 billion total, has also realized a significant increase in their unemployment rate and is currently living through an unsettling spike in their homicide rate.

Clearly giving money to city hall does not always directly improve the lives and well-being of city residents. Continuing to do the same thing and throw more money at the problem will not solve it. We need to think innovatively and empower residents to decide what they need as a community to prosper.

Recommend the "Community Empowerment" Program

Policy – Having such a program in place will remove municipalities from the position of power broker and transfer the decision making to a broader community as a whole. It will provide an investment directly into Connecticut's municipalities and aims to direct funding to programs that are deemed important by those who reside in the community.

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- All too often state monies flow to a municipality and the benefits of these funds are not directly felt by the residents of the community. The provisions of the Municipal Revenue Sharing Account adopted during the last legislative session pour millions of dollars into municipalities without any requirements of how the money will be spent. In the end, these funds can simply be used for political cronyism by hiring additional staff at town hall. This action does not help the single mother with three kids living just down the street. Nor does it help the junior in high school that is doing all that he can do to graduate high school safely and make a living for himself. This recommendation targets those monies going to municipalities for either enhanced PILOT reimbursement or general state sales tax sharing and requires that the funds be used by municipalities in the following way.
- As is provided in current law, the funds will flow through the city as is required, but the municipality would now be required to spend the monies as follows:
 - 35% will be spent on priorities of the Community Investment Boards (CIBs) as approved by a vote of the municipality;
 - 35% will be spent on priorities of the municipality; and
 - The remaining 30% will be made available for expenditure if the CIBs and municipal officials can agree on the expenditure;
 - If the municipality and the CIBs cannot agree, the 30% will remain with the state.
- Community Investment Boards would be comprised of all stakeholders in a community including residents, businesses, local religious leaders, community development corporations and other community groups. For municipalities with large populations, there will be one board for every neighborhood since the strengths and a weakness of each neighborhood varies and a city-wide program will not allow for the neighborhood-centric model that we are looking to create.
- Having buy-in from all community stakeholders ensures a homegrown method of solving one's problems. If it is additional job training, drug rehabilitation, after school or child care programs that are seen as critical for a neighborhood, and if assistance is ultimately provided, the empowerment of local residents will be felt and the will of the people to effectuate change will strengthen.

Remarket the Existing Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Program

Policy – To promote social capital in the state.

- The Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) program encourages individuals and businesses in distressed neighborhoods work collaboratively to prepare and implement a strategic plan to revitalize their neighborhood.
- Pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, once a municipality establishes a zone and a neighborhood committee is established and submits complete plans to the Office of Policy and Management, the state will assist in the revitalization of the neighborhood by providing comments on the proposed plans, coordinate state agencies to support the

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plans of the NRZs, and expedite the review of requests for modifications to codes and regulations that are identified as impediments to achieving the NRZs goals and objectives.

Solicit “Out of the Box” Ideas

Policy – State policymakers do not have all of the answers. This program will promote creative thinking towards solving problems that are facing urban communities.

- Create an “Urban Challenge” website which will invite people and organizations to submit proposals for dealing with specific urban area problems. If a viable suggestion is given for a particular problem, a pilot implementation of said suggestion can be implemented in a selected neighborhood. A state entity would monitor the policy’s implementation and assess the results. In addition, the state would provide a small monetary award for “solving” a particular problem similar to Eli Lilly’s InnoCentive initiative.

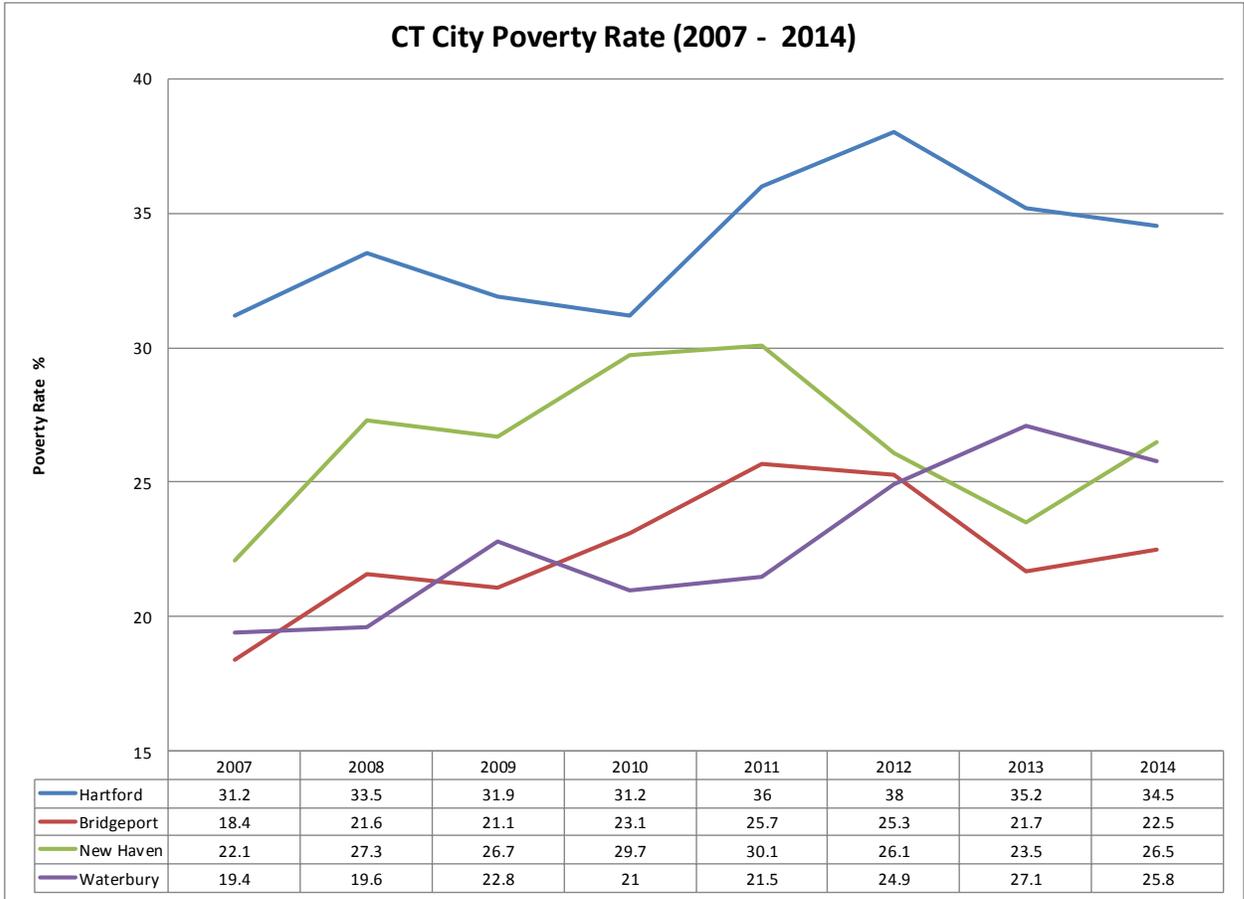
Enact a Commission to Examine Community Non-Profit Providers

Policy – Accountability for state taxpayers by ensuring that monies spent by the state are spent well.

- The state’s non-profit provider system is absolutely critical for the state to provide services for Connecticut citizens in a cost-effective manner. There are hundreds if not thousands of these providers that receive state funding for various purposes through the fiscal year.
- There is currently no mechanism to ensure that the large sum of state resources that is provided to any given provider is spent in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As a result those providers that excel at their job are supported the same as those that may not be as effective. The state needs a healthy and robust non-profit provider network if it is to succeed with all the initiatives currently in place and those that may come into place in the future.
- This initiative would create a bipartisan commission to review the various requirements that may currently be required by state agencies. This commission would further be charged with developing recommendations on a standard set of outcomes that would be required of all non-profit providers that receive state funding.
- Non-profit providers currently need to make different reports for different funding sources. This proposal would assist the non-profits to the extent that their reporting is streamlined across at least all state agencies. Further, this proposal would ensure that monies are going to only to those providers that are doing their job well rather than supporting entities and/or efforts that are shown to not be successful.

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Appendix A: All data from the following two charts are from the American Community Survey as compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau.



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