

December 15, 2023

Matthew J. Pugliese
Director, Community Investment Fund
Department of Economic and Community Development
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5 Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Mr. Matthew Pugliese:

The Waterbury delegation of Connecticut's General Assembly strongly supports the City of Waterbury's Community Investment Fund Round 4 application for the St. Lucy's Church Community Health Center's Project. CIF funding will re-establish such public infrastructure as a medical home for Waterbury's most vulnerable populations in an effort to bolster the health and wellbeing of Waterbury residents.

Upon award, CIF funds will enable this underused public space to be built-out into a hub for medical, dental and behavioral health suites, a laboratory and pharmacy in the church to allow neighborhood residents a one-stop shop approach to wellness in an area where these services are limited. This Center would have hoteling space available to community non-profits and social service organizations to allow them to meet with clients as well as meeting space to host training.

We recognize St. Lucy's Church, 24 Branch Street, as a prime location for this health center; this is a historically disadvantaged community (census tract 3503) located in the North End of Waterbury. These residents are plagued with burden thresholds related to workforce development and associated socioeconomic thresholds – linguistic isolation, low median income, high poverty rates, high unemployment rates, and low high-school education rates (CEJS 2023). The establishment of this Community Health Center will address the legacy of generational health inequities in this community and Waterbury residents through providing affordable, appropriate, accessible, and accountable healthcare.

Moreover, this project sits at the center of a constellation of public schools, the Police Activity League campus and Head Start at Team Inc., where 32.3% of the population is less than 18 years old and 64.7% of the population is Latino, largely originating from Puerto Rico (ACS, 2021). This census tract surpasses various poor health indicators, with rates of asthma and diabetes surpassing the 90th percentile in comparison to U.S. rates (EPA 2023). It is clear that there is a need to bring resources within this community in an effort to improve health outcomes for these residents.

Historically high inflation rates has challenged Waterbury, leaving residents to trade off healthcare services for daily basic needs such as food and gas. 40.2% of adults in households where it has been somewhat or very difficult to pay for usual household expenses in the last 7 days (ACS 2023). As of October 2023, 23.8% of adults within this neighborhood previously had COVID-19, with symptoms lasting 3 months or longer; 41.1% of households had children currently receiving food assistance, and 26.2% of adults were not able to pay their energy bill within the last 12 months (ACS 2023). But for this funding, these residents will continue to have to prioritize basic living expenses over their health, perpetuating the health challenges across generations of Waterbury residents.

We applaud the City's efforts to tackle this issue in a concerted effort to invest in improving access to affordable and quality healthcare. In 2023, The City of Waterbury's Health Department spearheaded the establishment of mobile, school-based, and centralized Community Health Centers, receiving a notification of Community Project Funding (Federal) of \$5.3 Million toward this project. Moreover, this grant would support the investments in both time and resources taken to ensure a holistic approach to healthcare in Waterbury, as evidenced by the City's purchase of this property in 2023 utilizing ARPA funds. The proposed outcome of this project is simple: to centralize a broad team of healthcare service providers, while ensuring resources are tailored to fit the patients' needs.

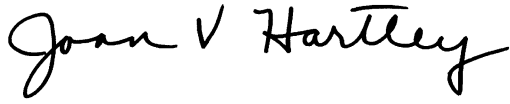
Upon redevelopment, this community-based health center will act as a venue for non-profit and social service organizations to reach community members without investing in permanent office space. This center is just one of many recent efforts to bolster the healthcare workforce in the city, alongside the recent merger of Waterbury Hospital, future establishment of UConn's School of Nursing, and programmatic expansion of healthcare training programs through the Region's Workforce investment board, all in an effort to improve Waterbury residents' access to medical, dental, and behavioral services will break the intergenerational health inequities experienced within this community.

We believe that this project will support the State of Connecticut's efforts to spur the establishment of Community Health Centers across municipal borders, acknowledging that this space will nurture a sense of community and connectedness in a high-needs neighborhood with potential to offer well-rounded services, such as transportation, translation, and culturally sensitive healthcare that many other providers do not.

We thank you and the State of Connecticut for your continued support in Waterbury and for considering this application. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Sincerely,



Senator Joan Hartley
15th Senate District



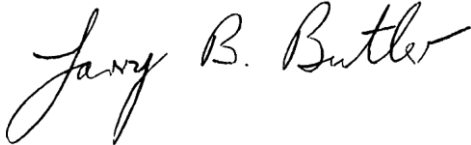
Senator Rob Sampson
16th Senate District



Representative Joe Polletta
68th Assembly District



Representative William Pizzuto
71st Assembly District



Representative Larry B. Butler
72nd Assembly District



Representative Michael DiGiovancarlo
74th Assembly District



Representative Geraldo Reyes, Jr.
75th Assembly District



Representative Lezlye Zupkus
89th Assembly District