



# 2024 INAUGURAL REPORT

**THE CONNECTICUT PROJECT**

**THE CONNECTICUT PROJECT ACTION FUND**



# A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Connecticut is a wonderful state. And it is a challenging state, particularly for the one in four residents who can't make ends meet each month, for whom the opportunity is rhetoric and not reality.

The Connecticut Project was created for action – practical, goal-focused, time-bound steps in collaboration with others, that improve the lives of all who call this state home, especially low-income families. We mobilize people, partners, and resources around solutions that advance the economic, child care, and housing interests of Connecticut families who aren't thriving. And we know that advancing change means confronting the systems, habits, and mindsets that impede opportunity now.

We are proud of the people who have joined our board and our team over the last two years -- well-recognized advocates, nonprofit leaders, academics, labor leaders, and more. We are also proud of the partnerships we have formed and the work we have done with nonprofits, grassroots organizations, government officials, workers' advocates, tenants' groups, and more, from every corner of the state.

Our first two years, described in this report, have demonstrated to us that we can contribute productively to the collective work that improves Connecticut, collaborating with people and organizations to achieve significant results. This report includes some of those examples. More importantly, we are excited for the work ahead described in this report, and for the relationships and learning we will continue as we reach – with you and others – for our shared goals.

We are excited to be two years into our journey. This shared project of improving Connecticut with families across the state is a worthy one, and we are glad to be joining so many of you in it.

Onward,

**Garth Harries**

President and CEO

**Kica Matos**

The Connecticut Project Action Fund  
Board Chair

**Steve Mandel**

The Connecticut Project  
Board Chair





# THE FUNDAMENTALS

## OUR MISSION

The Connecticut Project brings together communities, ideas, and resources to improve systems and generate real-world outcomes for people who are lower income or asset-limited.

## OUR VISION

We work for a just, thriving, and optimistic Connecticut where race, gender, income, geography, and other circumstances no longer predetermine opportunity.

## OUR ROLE

The Connecticut Project mobilizes people, partners, and resources around priorities that create economic opportunity for families, especially low-income families. We are a catalyst for timebound, results-oriented campaigns that advance positive outcomes for families and collaborate with impacted people, community groups, advocacy organizations, and others.

## WHO WE ARE

The Connecticut Project consists of two independent, distinct, and separately funded and governed organizations: The Connecticut Project, a 501c3 public charity, and The Connecticut Project Action Fund, a 501c4 advocacy organization. This allows us the greatest flexibility in our work and enables us to leverage everything we can to fight with and for low-income and asset-limited people in our state.

## WHERE WE'RE GOING

In 2024, we're connecting directly with people in Connecticut and mobilizing communities and partners around solutions to improve lives and drive down the cost of living in Connecticut. We're launching action-focused campaigns that:

- advance historic focus and investments in the **early childhood** experiences that shape our children's futures;
- expand access to **affordable housing** in communities across the state;
- strengthen tools that build the **financial wellbeing** of people in Connecticut, including the state's social safety net, workforce development, and wealth building opportunities;
- ensure our **public sector** is responsive to the voices, needs, and experiences of low-income and asset-limited people.



## CASE STUDY:

# Supporting More Than \$60 million of Student Debt Forgiveness for Connecticut Public Service Workers



Student loan debt can haunt people for decades, preventing them from building savings, accruing intergenerational wealth, and affording basic needs. Low-income people, people of color, and public service workers – people who are teachers, nurses, and nonprofit and government workers – are particularly hard-hit.

In August 2022, tens of thousands of Connecticut public service workers were eligible to have their student loan debt forgiven, under a waiver to the federal program known as “PSLF” (Public Student Loan Forgiveness). The deadline to apply was October 31, many eligible workers were in the dark, and others didn’t trust that the opportunity was real. Together with the Student Loan Fund, State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC), and other partners, The Connecticut Project created tools that supported Connecticut residents’ access to the PSLF program, amplified awareness of the PSLF across the state, and informed public service workers and their employers about the chance to have their student debt cancelled.



**Cancellation is an economic and racial justice issue.  
We cannot talk about living full, thriving lives if we have thousands and thousands in student debt hanging over our heads.  
People are putting off starting families, people can’t buy homes.**

**Cristher Estrada-Perez**  
Executive Director, Student Loan Fund



# AS A RESULT ...

Connecticut achieved the **7th highest rate** of cancellation in the country.

**7,750** Connecticut public servants had **\$507 million** of their debt cancelled.

PSLF coalition efforts alone led to an additional **\$60 to \$75 million** in forgiveness.



**When someone tells you about their debt cancellation, you can hear the emotional release in that moment. You can feel the heaviness leave and the excitement and the opportunity build ... I don't think I've ever worked with a funder so closely in terms of getting things done, and The Connecticut Project had the ability to roll up their sleeves and do it.**

**Cristher Estrada-Perez**  
Executive Director,  
Student Loan Fund

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- **Mobilize** to connect more people to existing **benefits** that enable them to thrive.
- Work in targeted geographies with early childhood education organizations and housing systems to create more **early education** seats for children and more **affordable housing** for families.

## CASE STUDY:

# Connecting People with Healthcare by Investing in Community Groups and Data

In 2023, thousands of Connecticut residents were at risk of losing Medicaid coverage because of the federal government's "unwinding" of Medicaid eligibility waivers. At the same time, thousands of people were newly eligible for Medicaid in Connecticut because of a state law expanding coverage to undocumented Connecticut residents who were pregnant or under 13.



Many people in the state saw the huge opportunity – and challenges – in these moments. The Connecticut Health Foundation (CHF) expanded their "trusted messengers" network, which included local organizations like the Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers and HUSKY 4 Immigrants, to assist with Medicaid enrollment.

With the support of The Connecticut Project and several community foundations, CHF mobilized 33 community organizations, enabling outreach that informed families about Medicaid changes and helped them navigate online systems and resolve enrollment issues. This effort also prioritized regular meetings with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to address and resolve concerns.

Simultaneously, The Connecticut Project funded two strategic data positions at the State Medicaid office, including a data scientist. Among other projects to improve Medicaid access, this initiative introduced the idea of using SNAP eligibility to automatically enroll people in Medicaid. Early estimates suggested that 81,000 more people could access Medicaid using this enrollment method.

Through these efforts and others, Connecticut is on the path toward more people having access to healthcare.



# AS A RESULT...

Connecticut has the  
**6th lowest**  
Medicaid disenrollment rate  
in the country.

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**11,235**  
**immigrants**  
enrolled in Medicaid under the  
expanded coverage,  
**70% more than expected.**



**One of the main concerns as a father, as a parent, is to make sure that your kids have a future and they have opportunities. We're now able to make sure that both kids are able to have access to doctors and medical help without having to pay out of pocket for it.**

**J., Stamford**  
Father of Two

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- Exploring ways to **scale and sustain the trusted messenger model** of communication, rooted in strong community relationships.
- Finding more ways to ensure solid **data** gets used by government and nonprofits to **directly improve people's lives.**

# CASE STUDY:

## Building Early Childhood Education for the Future



Every child should have the chance to learn and grow in safe, supportive, nurturing environments, and early childhood education is an important piece of providing children with the best starts in life. But right now, Connecticut is in the midst of an early education crisis.

In addition to other work by The Connecticut Project, The Connecticut Project Action Fund advocated for two policies to help. In 2023, the legislature passed a new law requiring children to be five years old by September 1 to start kindergarten, delaying children born between September 1 and December 31 from entering kindergarten. With our partners, The Connecticut Project Action Fund began a campaign in 2023 to highlight the ways the new policy, while well-intended, forced thousands of families to pay for an extra year of child care they did not expect, in an early childhood education system that already did not have enough funding or available seats for children.

At the same time, we advocated for additional solutions to strengthen the early childhood education system. In 2021, Connecticut became the first state to create childcare business incubators -- a regulated program through which would-be educators who face barriers opening child care programs in their homes can do so by partnering with a host site. In addition to no-cost space, host sites provide training and other support to help educators create more early childhood education opportunities for children.

Connecticut's 2021 law, however, allows for incubator licenses in only seven cities with only one facility per city, and licenses expire in 2026. Recognizing a promising idea, The Connecticut Project is helping municipalities to jump-start their incubator programs, and The Connecticut Project Action Fund is advocating for the legislature to expand the incubator program.



**Right now, there are a lot of parents around the state who are trying to register their children for the upcoming school year and aren't sure if they'll be able to afford child care if they can't register their kids [for kindergarten].**

**Moriah Lopez**  
Working Mother of Two





# AS A RESULT...

More than **3,000 parents** told their legislators to delay the kindergarten age change law and invest in early childhood education.

**All seven** authorized child care incubators are on the path to open in 2024, and others have expressed interest.

As of press time, the Connecticut Senate had **passed a bill** expanding the child care incubator model.



**There are many areas of Connecticut which have a high percentage of resident renters, low child care inventory, and a potential workforce that needs the additional support to become successful child care entrepreneurs. Connecticut's willingness to support this non-traditional, hybrid approach to childcare places us at the forefront of a movement trying to innovate to be sustainable.**

**Tracey Madden-Hennessey**  
Executive Director,  
YWCA of New Britain

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- **Informing parents** affected by the change to kindergarten eligibility of their options, no matter how the legislature acts.
- **Supporting early childhood educators** and municipalities in their incubator work and seeking other ways to **increase quality early childhood education** options for children.
- **Amplifying the needs of families with young children**, actively engaging and advocating for working families, including supporting quarterly reports that help our state improve young children's wellbeing and that of the important adults in their lives.



# OTHER EARLY ACTIONS

## EARLY VOTING

Every voter should have equal access to the ballot box, and early voting was one way to help more working people to do just that. With a wide coalition of organizations, we educated voters about the 2022 ballot question to create early voting in Connecticut. After voters passed that measure, we co-led the campaign urging the legislature to fund enough early voting locations to help equalize early voting access throughout our state.



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Each part of the state faces unique challenges in addressing the affordable housing crisis. We invested in the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut's effort to create the new Center for Housing Equity and Opportunity in Eastern Connecticut (CHEO), building more power and opportunity for housing access in 52 towns.

## ACCESS TO CHILD CARE

Every child should have the chance to grow and learn in safe, nurturing environments. We actively supported partners that provided logistical, administrative, and research assistance to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel in addition to our direct support of the panel's and Child Care for Connecticut's Future community outreach efforts; reinforcing our dedication to fostering a brighter future for children in our state.

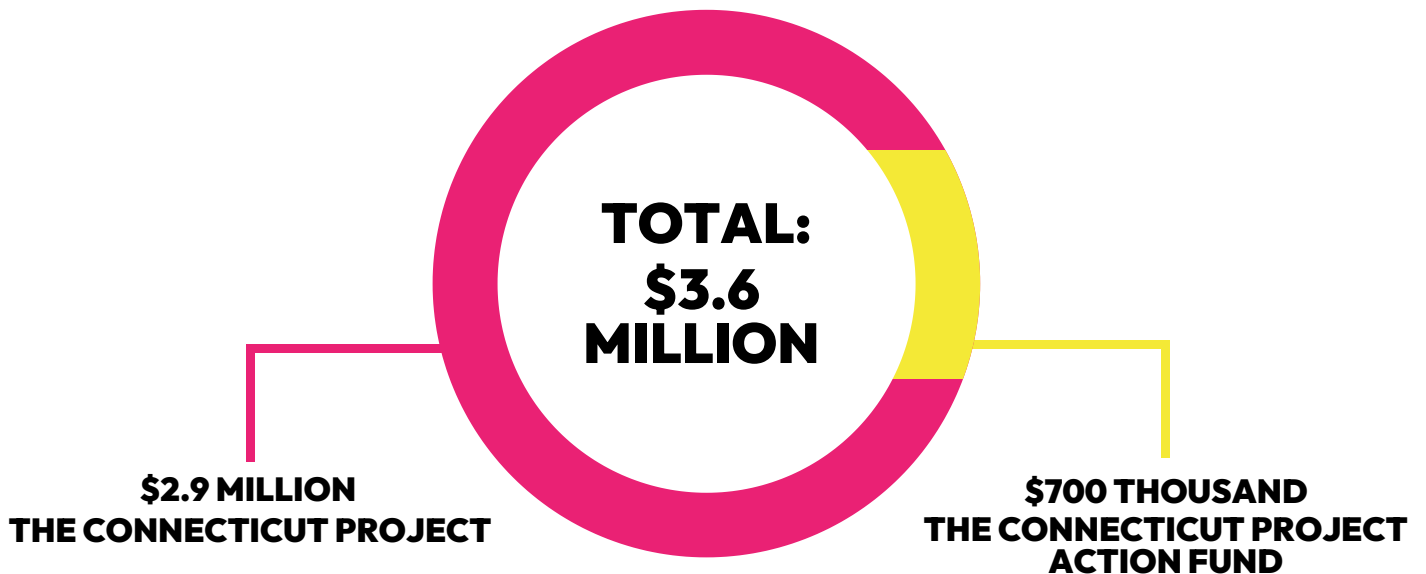




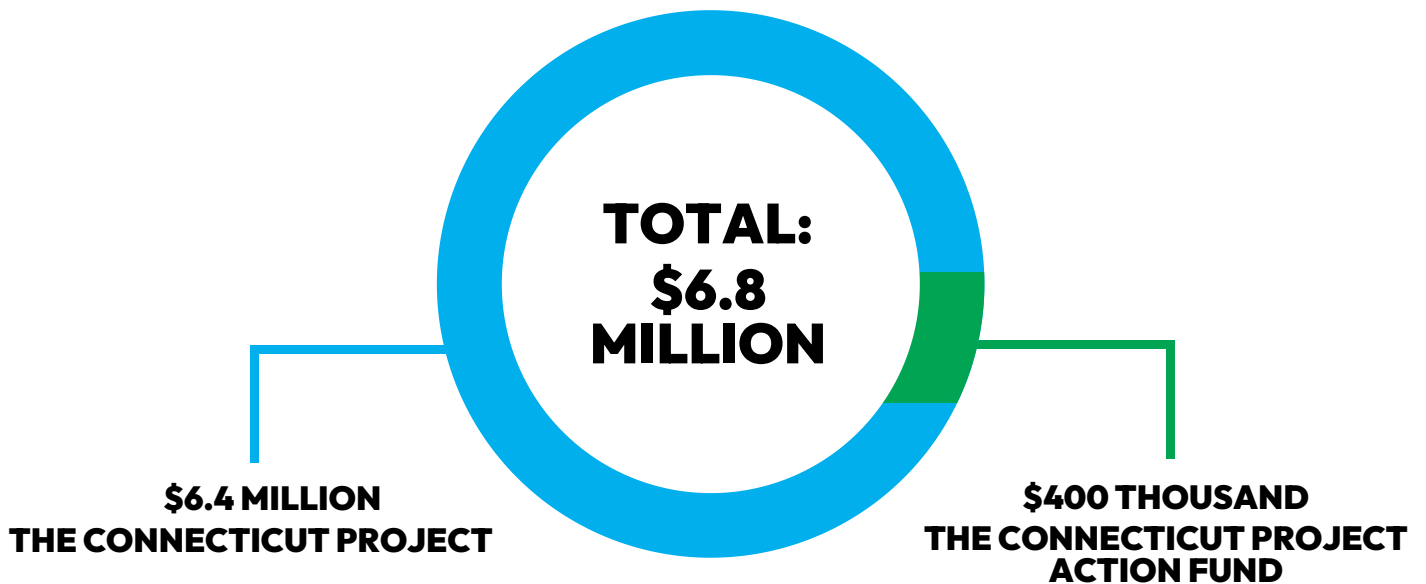
# **FINANCIALS**

## **FY 2023**

### **TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES**



### **TOTAL PROGRAMMATIC EXPENSES**



For a list of our grantees, please visit [www.ctproject.org](http://www.ctproject.org)

# THANK YOU

Everyone has a role in creating a just, thriving, and optimistic Connecticut where race, gender, income, geography, and other circumstances no longer predetermine opportunity. We are grateful to the many organizations and individuals who have been instrumental in shaping The Connecticut Project in our first two years by providing counsel, working in coalition, implementing programmatic work through our grants, and adding to our vision of a Connecticut where everyone thrives.

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