

March 17, 2021

Dear Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Angela Bellas and I live in Manchester, Connecticut. **I stand in support of S.B. No. 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.** My comments are focused on Sections 6 and 7 to declare racism as a public health crisis in the state and establish a commission to study the impact of institutional racism on public health and on Section 10 to define the doula profession.

Overwhelming racial health disparities in life expectancy, chronic health disease, pregnancy and birth outcomes and most recently COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths persist across the United States and right here in Connecticut (CDC, 2020; Connecticut Department of Health, 2020; Connecticut Health Foundation, 2020). These racial health disparities are grounded in white supremacy, the trauma of racism and the social determinants of health. We must take bold action to reduce and eliminate racial health disparities and promote holistic health and healing.

Racism is a public health crisis. Connecticut must treat it as such to actually address the crisis and achieve better, more equitable health outcomes- to save lives and improve quality of life; to extend the time parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles have with their children and grandchildren and one another. For every life lost; for every year lost- our families and our communities lose so much. One year into the COVID-19 pandemic more than a half million people have died in the U.S. alone and it is Black, Indigenous and Latinx families that are grieving at disproportionately high rates. I am heartbroken for the family of an old friend whom I recently learned died of COVID-19 at the end of 2020- a beautiful, vibrant, loving Black father in his early 40s- may he rest in peace. His sister continues to mourn a brother, an aunt and a grandmother- all within a few short months in 2020.

S.B. 1 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. I stand with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis and ask that the following recommendations also be considered in this bill.

- The name of the commission be changed to be reflective of its work such as "The Connecticut Commission on Racial Impact and Reconciliation"
- A commitment to 2 members of the proposed commission be persons of color, residing in a major city of Connecticut with an annual income of less than \$65,000 creating a total of 12 commission members.
- Expand racial/ethnic data collection to expose disparities in communities.
- A review and reform of the legislative process to improve public accessibility and set in place mechanism to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race.
- Training for OLR and OFA to create racial and ethnic impact assessments
- Establishing a clear racial equity approach in policies set forth by the executive branch.

I also respectfully recommend the following: Lines 204-207 reflect a "doula" means a trained, nonmedical professional who provides physical, emotional, and informational support to a pregnant person before, during, and after birth, in person or virtually

Among high-income countries, the United States consistently faces the worst rate of pregnancy/childbirth-related deaths. Connecticut sees substantial and persistent disparities in maternal/gestational parent deaths by race and ethnicity. Black women/gestational parents are **three to**

four times as likely to die during or related to pregnancy than white women/gestational parents, regardless of socioeconomic status. Increasing equitable access to doula care services has been shown to improve outcomes for mothers/gestational parents and newborns. Doulas and the care they provide can improve these outcomes.

This policy proposal is crucial to doulas in Connecticut. Title protection is crucial and provides stronger identity and credibility, and prevents misrepresentation of the profession. A doula is a non-medical professional trained in childbirth who provides emotional, physical, and informational support to a person who is expecting, is experiencing labor, or has recently given birth. A doula's purpose is to help people have safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experiences. **I commend the efforts of the study** to determine whether the Department of Public Health should establish a state certification process by which a person can be certified as a state doula to ensure no doula be barred from this process.

In closing, I urge you to support S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic with consideration of these recommended modifications.

Sincerely,

Angela Bellas, MSW
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