



March 17, 2021

Connecticut General Assembly, Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3000
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony of the American Lung Association in Connecticut in Support of Senate Bill 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

Dear Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Ruth Canovi and I am the American Lung Association's Director of Advocacy in Connecticut. The Lung Association appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on *SB 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic*.

The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health association in the United States, currently representing the 37 million Americans living with lung diseases including asthma, lung cancer and COPD, including over 432,000 Connecticut residents. The Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy.

Data show¹ that black and brown communities bear a greater burden of lung disease than white communities. Social determinants of health really do have a large impact on our wellness and it is important to understand where the disparities in disease burden lay in order to achieve health equity. One important step to take is to collect data to fully understand how populations are impacted as they access healthcare services, including public health services. SB 1 requires any state agency, or contractor for that agency, as it relates to healthcare, that collects data on race, ethnicity and primary language to make that data usable to discern where disparities exist. It also requires agencies to allow for individuals to choose multiple categories and categories such as "other." These data will allow Connecticut to identify disparities in healthcare and opportunities to design appropriate and effective programs to address identified inequities.

The American Lung Association's Public Policy Agenda includes, "Support investments and policies that eliminate health disparities caused by systemic racism; and build health equity across all policy areas."² SB 1 would recognize racism as a threat to public health and create a commission on disparities. These are needed first steps to create health equity in Connecticut. For example, because of systemic racism throughout our country, communities of color are often exposed to greater air pollution and bear a higher burden of lung disease. While recognizing racism as a public health threat will not immediately alleviate these disparities, it does identify the threats that currently exist. This commission on disparities will identify policy changes that can improve health equity. We certainly recognize the need for this and know

there are lots of areas to focus on that overlap with the mission of the Lung Association. Looking at asthma rates, air quality, the burden of tobacco as well as access to health care are all important places to look and institutional and systemic racism impact these public health issues. Racism itself is a major public health issue.

The American Lung Association in Connecticut supports SB 1 and urges its swift passage. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Ruth Canovi, MPH
Advocacy Director, Connecticut.

¹ American Lung Association. Trends in Lung Disease. Dec 2020. Accessed at:
<https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease>

² American Lung Association. Public Policy Agenda for the 117th Congress (2021-2022). Accessed at:
<https://www.lung.org/policy-advocacy/public-policy-agenda>