



**Testimony of Ted Doolittle
Office of the Healthcare Advocate
Before the Public Health Committee
Re SB 1
March 17, 2021**

Good afternoon, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, and members of the Public Health Committee. For the record, I am Ted Doolittle, Healthcare Advocate for the State of Connecticut. The Office of the Healthcare Advocate (“OHA”) is an independent state agency with a consumer-focused mission: assuring consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; assisting consumers in disputes with their health insurance carriers; and informing legislators and regulators regarding problems that consumers are facing in accessing care, and proposing solutions to those problems.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comment in strong support of SB 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access To Mental, Behavioral And Physical Health Care In Response To The Pandemic. Most importantly, Section 6 of this bill would memorialize in statute Connecticut’s declaration that racism is a public health crisis. As recent events have highlighted repeatedly, the scourge of racism continues to manifest itself in countless overt and subtle ways throughout our country, including in Connecticut. Among those manifestations are the disparities in health care outcomes that persist between white Americans and members of our Black and other marginalized communities.

If adopted, SB 1 would establish this General Assembly (along with Virginia’s General Assembly) as one of the first among state legislatures to declare racism, in all of its

forms, as an ongoing threat to public health. Connecticut’s formal acknowledgement of this role that racism plays in yielding disparate health outcomes is a critical step towards eradicating such discriminatory outcomes, and indeed towards ending racism itself.

In further support of the goals of this bill, OHA respectfully submits that this bill could be strengthened by including the following language, which was favorably reported by the Insurance and Real Estate Committee in 2019: “The General Assembly finds that equal enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a human right and a priority of this state.”¹

Thank you very much for your consideration of this testimony in support of SB 1.² If you have any questions concerning our position on this issue, please feel free to contact me at Ted.Doolittle@ct.gov.

¹ See 2019 SB 330 at:

https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/CGABillStatus/CGABillstatus.asp?which_year=2019&selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB330

² OHA further supports Section 18 of SB 1, regarding community benefits programs. OHA’s testimony in support of HB 6550, which included the same language as Section 18, can be found here:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/PHdata/Tmy/2021HB-06550-R000308-Doolittle,%20Ted-Office%20of%20Healthcare%20Advocate-TMY.PDF>