

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

My name is Terry Fitzgerald and I live in Enfield Connecticut. I serve as Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator for YWCA Hartford Region. **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.** I specifically would like to support Sections 6 & 7 to declare racism as a public health crisis in Connecticut and establish a commission to study the impact of institutional racism on public health and section 10 to establish the definition of a doula within state statutes and conduct a study to determine the establishment of a state certification process for doulas.

This past year has put a spotlight on the disparity that has existed all along for communities of color in regard to public health and racial justice. We must not ignore the systemic and structural racism that negatively impacts our friends, neighbors and residents of our state. 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 ie. “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.**

Title protection for a Doula is crucial and provides stronger identity and credibility, and prevents misrepresentation of the profession. Everyone should have access to doula services, allowing anyone going through the birthing process the best experience possible. The childbirth process can be a vulnerable time and having an advocate to support you through the process can be integral to a positive experience and for individuals of color lifesaving. Approximately 700 women die each year in the United States during and after pregnancy. Racial disparities in pregnancy-related deaths show that across all income and education levels, Black women in the U.S. are at higher risk for poor outcomes than white women. Doulas and the care they provide can improve these outcomes. Solutions for health equity need to take into account the social, political, and historical context of race and ethnicity in this country.

**Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, 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.**

Sincerely,

Terry Fitzgerald