

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly's Public Health Committee  
In Support of Senate Bill 1  
March 17, 2021

Senator Daugherty Abrams (Co-Chair), Representative Steinberg (Co-Chair) and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Tracy Johnson Russell and I live in Bethany, Connecticut. I also serve as Rector at St. Monica's Episcopal Church in Hartford, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic. More specifically Section 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.

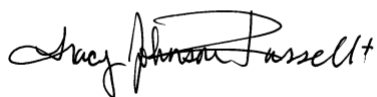
This has been a difficult year for us all in so many ways...a year that has changed the way that we care for one another. Yet, it has also been a year that has brought into the spotlight the systemic racism that exists in our nation and our state. The reality of the disproportionate rate in which black and brown people lost their lives to COVID-19, speaks to the need for real, immediate, and systemic action when addressing the inequality that exists in the health care system.

Senate Bill 1 is an opportunity for our state to be a leader in our collective pursuit of racial justice, equity, and reconciliation. Now, is the time for 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 the work it will be charged to do. For example, "The Connecticut Commission on Racial Impact and Reconciliation".
- A commitment to ensure that at least 2 members of the proposed commission be persons of color, who reside 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 the disparities that exist in those 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 urge you to support Senate Bill 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

Sincerely,



Reverend Tracy Johnson Russell  
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