

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

My name is Melinda I. Johnson I am the Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy with the YWCA Hartford Region and I am a resident of Hartford Connecticut. The YWCA Hartford Region continues to serve our community through our mission to eliminate racism and empower women. In the spirit of our mission 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 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.

From 2020 to present we have found ourselves faced with a trifold crisis in our country. A global pandemic that is still underway, an economic crisis which is yet to stabilize and the undeniable reality of systemic and structural racism. While all of us have been impacted by our present challenges, black and brown communities who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised have found themselves grasping for resiliency where there ought to be resources and reconciliation.

The State of Connecticut must lead at the intersection of racial justice and public health. The detriments of racial injustice and inequitable care are made apparent in maternal morbidity amongst black women. According to information provided by Connecticut Health Foundation and DataHaven Health Equity Connecticut pregnancy related deaths are higher in Black women. The Black maternal mortality rate is currently at a 48.0 compared to the White maternal mortality rate of 14.8. Systemic and structural racism must be addressed in our state because lives are at stake.

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 mechanisms to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race.
- Training for **Office of Legislative Research** and Office of Fiscal Analysis to create racial and ethnic impact assessments
- Establishing a clear racial equity approach in policies set forth by the executive branch.

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.