

Testimony in Support

S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

March 17, 2021

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

My name is Rev. Teran Loeppke and I live in Hamden, 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.**

It's extremely important to me that racism be declared a public health crisis in Connecticut because ours is a state still suffering from an inability to recognize that white supremacy exists all around us, no matter whether a blue state or red state. Sometimes it's even easier to avoid facing the reality of racism, as a white person, in a "blue" state where it's at least "officially" off limits to act in racist ways. This work is never done though, and declaring racism a public health crisis will give me another social leg on which to stand as I continue to strive to be doing the work of undoing white supremacy in myself as a white man and as best I can in the community around me.

It seems very obvious to me that racism would extend into the spheres of health care delivery and access, for example. Yet as a white person I don't have to deal with it. **I don't wonder whether my white doctors and other care givers are going to hate me or fear me. And then there's the simple fact that being black in Connecticut is deadly in and of itself as we continue to see with the senseless killings of black and brown people by police.** That all by itself proves that racism is a public health emergency. We just have not officially declared it. Why not?

This legislation impacts my family and community directly because my wife's cousin is black, his wife of Puerto Rican descent and they have two children. They want to move to Connecticut when they are able from New York City—and while declaring racism a public health emergency won't solve every problem it will provide an official mechanism to make undoing white supremacy in health care access and delivery a state-sanctioned endeavor.

That is not nothing, especially in a state where the writers of the state constitution considered black people property and enslaved them. I would feel honestly a bit better about my wife's cousin's family moving here if this part of SB1 were to pass.

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.

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.

Thank you,
Rev. Teran Loeppke, Hamden, CT