



## Testimony of Rochelle Palache, District Director and Vice President 32BJ SEIU

March 17, 2021

### SB 1: An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

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Thank you to Joint Committee on Public Health for holding this hearing. My name is Rochelle Palache and I am testifying on behalf 32BJ which represents over 4,500 building service workers in the state of Connecticut; the majority of which are people of color.

I wish to speak specifically to sections 6 and 7 of the bill which would declare racism a public health crisis and establish a committee to study the impacts of racism on public health. The ongoing Covid-19 crisis highlights why Connecticut must take action on this issue. When it comes to cases per capita Hispanics and American Indians had a rate about twice as high as Whites, while Blacks had a rate that was about 60% higher.<sup>1</sup> While the age adjusted rate of deaths was over twice as high for Blacks as Whites.<sup>2</sup> These health disparities are the product of racism whether systemic or interpersonal, conscious or unconscious.

Medical experts classify racism as a social determinant of health.<sup>3</sup> Racism can directly impact health because of the stress caused by experiencing racism, such stress can predispose individuals to chronic diseases.<sup>4</sup> Racism can also impact health indirectly by affecting other factors known to affect health such as education, housing quality and income.<sup>5</sup>

Connecticut would not be the first state to declare racism a public health crisis, according to the American Public Health Association eight states have already done so, as have 19 municipalities here in Connecticut.<sup>6</sup>

While a mere declaration that racism is a public health crisis will be nothing more than an acknowledgement of reality, section 7 of the bill creates a committee that will study this issue in depth and across multiple areas where racism might impact human health. This committee will also propose legislative action to address the inequities that it uncovers, as such this bill will be a crucial first step in addressing the health and overall impacts of racism in Connecticut. To meet this purpose, we recommend that at least two members of the Committee be persons of color residing in a major city in Connecticut and earning less than \$65,000 a year.

No person is an island, improving the health of minority Connecticut residents will help everyone in the long term and so we ask you to stand with us and support the bill and help us improve public health.

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<sup>1</sup> *The COVID Tracking Project*, THE ATLANTIC (March 4, 2021), <https://covidtracking.com/data/state/connecticut>

<sup>2</sup> *COVID-19 in Connecticut: Data Analysis*, CT DATA HAVEN (Nov. 11, 2020), <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/reports/covid-19-connecticut-data-analysis>

<sup>3</sup> Maria Trent et al., *The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health*, PEDIATRICS (2019), <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/144/2/e20191765>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Racism is a Public Health Crisis*, AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION (last visited March 16, 2021) <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health/racism-declarations>