

Rev. Josh Pawelek
Glastonbury, CT
Testimony in Support of
S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health
Care in Response to the Pandemic.

Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee:

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester. I am a clergy leader with the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, which is a partner in the Connecticut Campaign to Declare Racism as a Public Health Crisis. I live in Glastonbury. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 1. I am speaking specifically about lines 77 to 163 which call for the policy declaration of racism as a public health crisis.

I am convinced this declaration is necessary. The data on how the coronavirus has impacted black, indigenous, and people of color communities more severely than white communities across the country and in Connecticut should be enough for every reasonable person to recognize that racism is a public health crisis. Data on racial disparities in maternal deaths, infant mortality, diabetes, heart disease, and many other common diseases should be enough for any reasonable person to recognize racism is a public health crisis. Data on the social determinants of health, including access to healthy, fresh food, access to decent education, access to affordable housing, access to secure employment, and access to quality, affordable, culturally-sensitive health care, should be enough for any reasonable person to recognize that racism is a public health crisis for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

The proposal to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to examine racial disparities in public health is the right first step. The proposed scope of the examination is broad enough for the commission to understand the full extent of the crisis. My concern is that we don't yet have the necessary infrastructure and funding in place to implement the Commission's recommendations once it begins reporting back to the General Assembly. But that should in no way deter any of you from supporting the basic thrust of this bill.

Once again, it is time we declare racism as a public health crisis and address it with the same resolve, conviction and dedication of resources we would give to any other crisis. I hope and trust the 2021 General Assembly will not go down in history as yet one more legislative body that refused to lead despite the clear evidence of a crisis. I hope this General Assembly will be remembered for recognizing the depths of the problem and doing everything in its power to address it.

Thank you.

Rev. Josh Pawelek