

Testimony from Joan Pritchard of Hartford, CT

S.B. Bill No. 1: An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

To the Committee on Public Health:

I support S.B. Bill No. 1 and urge the committee to pass this bill on the general assembly for action. This bill will address a serious need for comprehensive health care among communities of color. It is well known that the effects of systemic racism impact the health and wellbeing of people of color and that those effects have been exacerbated by the pandemic. As a white woman of means, I have been able to avoid getting infected and receive the health care that I need. It has not been difficult for me. I realize this is not so for people who have had to work in the public arena and engage closely with people throughout this past year. It is people of color that have been most exposed to COVID and have suffered the consequences most acutely. This happened on top of the usual struggle for health care that they have had to negotiate prior to the pandemic.

Systemic and structural racism play a large role in determining the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age. It affects people's access to quality housing, education, food, transportation, political power, and other social determinants of health. Racism also has negative mental and physical health consequences such as depression, anxiety, hypertension, preterm birth, shortened life span and poor quality of life. Understanding and addressing racism from this public health perspective is crucial to eliminating racial and ethnic inequities, and to improving opportunity and well-being across communities.

Six states have already declared racism a public health crisis as well as a number of municipalities, organizations and other entities. In Connecticut, 20 municipalities have declared racism a public health crisis. I urge you to support this bill.

Thank you,

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