



The Unitarian Society of Hartford

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"There are many paths approaching the truth that unites us"

*Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Public Health Committee in **Support of S.B. 1** An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.*

March 16, 2021

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

We are the co-ministers of the Unitarian Society of Hartford, a Unitarian Universalist congregation with over 200 members from around the region. Our congregation is a member of GHIAA (the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance). I am in support of SB 1, and specifically Sections 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.

As white pastors of a mostly white congregation, it is our moral obligation to stand with the least of these, to amplify the voices of the incredible leaders of color around our state who are paving the way towards a better Connecticut -- one in which racial equity and racial justice are at the top of every agenda.

Every time we go to the grocery store or post office, we ask the workers if they have had access to the COVID vaccine yet. Nearly every person we talk to is a person of color who is too young to get the vaccine right now. Each of them has a family, many of them have compromised immune systems, most of them have lost someone in their family to COVID-19. This is part of the way racism exacerbates the public health crisis -- by once again allowing disproportionate impact and harm to fall on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Arab, immigrants and other people of color.

S.B. 1 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. **We 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, we urge you to support S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

In faith and love,

Revs. Cathy and Heather Rion Starr
Hartford ministers and West Hartford residents