

My name is **Pharis Sasa**, I am a second-year medical student at Quinnipiac University's Frank H. Netter MD School of medicine and a resident of Hamden, CT. Today I am here to speak **in favor of the bill S.B 01 "An act equalizing comprehensive access to mental, behavioral, and physical health care in response to the pandemic"**.

As we enter over one year of this pandemic, now seems a good time to analyze our response and whether we were able to take effective actions protect ourselves. The answer is an emphatic no, as a society we were unable to prevent the rapid spread of the virus, we were too cowardly to enact the tough health and economic policies that would have saved lives, and we were too arrogant in reopening during the summer causing the dramatic spikes we saw into the winter. These local, state, and federal failings led to the unnecessary deaths of over 535,000 individuals within our country. With the dramatic effects of climate change, the rapid rate of urbanization throughout the world, and the continued destruction of the wilderness, the risk of another pandemic level illness increases by the day. Thus sections 4 and 5 of this proposed legislation are incredibly necessary steps that need to be taken to both understand this pandemic we are still working though and to prepare ourselves for the inevitable of the next illness.

If we continue our analysis of our pandemic response one thing will become abundantly clear, those identifying as minorities within our community endured an unequally heavy burden during this pandemic. Minorities communities consistently suffered greater losses and received less help, even though the SARS-CoV 2 virus treats us all equally. Within our own state of Connecticut; black individuals are dying from COVID 25% more than white individuals and Hispanic individuals are dying 50% more. The height of these disparities, deaths reached 100% more for Hispanic individuals and 50% more for black individuals during the summer months; this data was collected by the UConn Health Disparities institute. As for vaccine distribution black individuals have received 3.4% of vaccinations and Hispanic individuals have received 5.2% of vaccinations despite making up 10% and 14% of the state's population respectively; and this doesn't even account for the unequal burden of disease they have suffered. These issues of racial inequality in healthcare do not start and stop during this pandemic. These numbers are a continuation of long standing and disturbing trend that has seen the systematic mistreatment of racial and ethnic minorities at the hands of the healthcare, criminal justice, and economic systems. The effects of which on the health of these communities has been detrimental. Therefore, it is imperative this bill be passed which includes sections 6 and 7. These sections look to declare racism as the public health crisis that it is and to establish a truth and reconciliation commission that looks to examine racial disparities in public health. This bill is a desperately needed first step to righting the centuries of mistreatment of minority communities at the hands of the powerful.