



CT Black Women

Written Testimony of
Pamela Selders of Hartford, CT
Founder of CT Black Women
Before the Public Health Committee
On Legislation
of S.B. 1 - An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and
Physical Health
Care in Response to the Pandemic

March 17, 2021

Good Day Senator Daugherty Abrams (Co-Chair), Representative Steinberg (Co-Chair) and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly. My name is Pamela Selders, Founder of CT Black Women, a group of Black women of conscience working together in supporting and building ourselves and our community through activism, advocacy, education and creativity and Co-Founder of Moral Monday CT, a statewide group of persons of faith and conscious doing our work at the intersection of social justice and the Movement for Black Lives.

I write to you in support of support of **S.B. 1 - An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic**, specifically Section 6 and 7 declaring racism as a public health crisis in the state and establish a commission to study the impact of institutional racism on public health charged with rendering recommendations back to the Connecticut General Assembly for further considerations.

For years I have consistently stood as a Black woman with and within the Movement for Black Lives alongside the thousands of others demanding an end to the violence against Black Americans. The public health crisis this bill seeks to

address is not one that started with the recent murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, nor did it start with the killings of Mike Brown, Jr., Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland or Trayvon Martin. Police violence is only one manifestation of racism as a public health crisis. This crisis began over 500 years ago with the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and has evolved to manifest itself today as mass incarceration, over policing, police brutality, disproportionate negative health outcomes, and discrimination, just to name a few.

Centuries of public policy created racial disparities either intentionally or by neglect in health care, housing, human services and on. Our urban communities here in Connecticut see the impacts in every facet of health and human service from behavioral healthcare providers to child and adult protection, in doctor's office and hospitals, schools, prisons and nursing homes. In each of these areas of practice, racial disparities in outcomes are common, not because of factors internal to Black/Brown/Indigenous people, but because of racism in the environment.

S.B. 1 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. Please consider the following recommendations:

- The name of the commission be changed to be reflective of its work, "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.

Many of us in all kinds of ways, work every day to support the health and wellness of all Connecticut residents, but our efforts are hampered by the lack of acknowledgment and proactive policies that would address the real, historical roots of these issues, including racism. Despite the incredible civil rights victories of the 1960s, won through protest, public outrage and courageous forward moving laws and policies, racism in the United States have never been adequately acknowledged or addressed. SB 1 would take an important step forward in acknowledging and ending the harm done to Black, Brown and Indigenous communities across the state.

We believe it is time to come to terms with what many of us have been advocating for from across this state. We have this moment, right now, to forward something new. Let us do it, together.

Thank you for your consideration.