



**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**SENATE DEMOCRATS**

Legislative Office Building, Room 3300  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

We write today to testify in support of **Senate Bill 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.**

Senate Bill 1 is both responsive to the needs of this state in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and preparative for the public health needs of our state in advance of another public health crisis. The bill is written to address several areas that we believe urgently need the legislature's attention.

The citizens of our state have been impacted by physical and mental health tolls as they weathered this pandemic, and this bill seeks to provide additional resources to meet those needs. Senate Bill 1 investigates and responds to the needs of children by requiring a study into where affordable care for children is limited in our state, appropriating funds for school-based health center expansion and creation and having Boards of Education conduct interviews with students as they withdraw from school where they will provide resources. This bill is responsive to the current strain on our state's healthcare systems by establishing a peer support specialist certification program, requiring the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services to launch a mental health toolkit to empower employers to identify and support the mental health needs of employees, and establishing a pilot program to conduct home visits with patients who are at risk for repetitive use of emergency services and work to manage their chronic illnesses or medication plans. Finally, the bill appropriates funds to DPH for community-based health care provider grants, requires physicians to perform a mental health examination on patients during their annual physical exam and appropriates funds to make mobile crisis intervention services available 24/7 – two proactive measures for mental health care.

The state has also been deeply affected by COVID-19, and Senate Bill 1 is uniquely poised to address the state's present and future response to public health emergencies. For example, the bill requires DPH to conduct a study on the state's COVID-19 response and report their findings and to designate an employee to serve as the Pandemic Preparedness Officer. The bill mandates at least one nurse per each two patients in a hospital, and that local health departments must designate an acting director, in the case of a vacancy, in 30 days or have one appointed for them by DPH. Finally, this bill adopts the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA) model, which allows medical professionals with licenses to practice in the state during a declared emergency without seeking licensure. Each of these measures will help us identify and act upon the lessons we have learned in the process of responding to COVID-19 as a state.

Finally, we know that those in the state who are most marginalized are most drastically impacted in the event of a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic was, unfortunately, no exception – it hurt our state's most marginalized residents most deeply. Senate Bill 1 has a number of measures that seek to expand equity in healthcare. The bill will declare racism as a public health issue in our state, create a Truth and

Reconciliation Commission to examine our state's racial disparities in public health. It asks DPH to establish a breast health and breast cancer awareness program, and to conduct a study on doula certification. In supporting Senate Bill 1, we will be supporting implicit bias training for staff members in hospitals who provide direct care to pregnant or postpartum patients, and the establishment of a study into racial inequities in maternal mortality. Further, this bill will require OPM to join with other offices in the state to study the impacts of COVID-19 – including the disparate effects based on demographics, demographic information collection in all healthcare, and the expansion of community benefits in hospitals across the state.

Senate Bill 1 is legislation that will lead our state into a stronger and safer future and will protect and provide mental and physical wellbeing amongst our residents. We support it, and I ask you to do the same.



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Martin M. Looney  
President Pro Tempore  
State Senator 11<sup>th</sup> District



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Bob Duff  
Senate Majority Leader  
State Senator 25<sup>th</sup> District



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Norm Needleman  
State Senator 33<sup>rd</sup> District



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State Senator 10<sup>th</sup> District



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Derek Slap  
State Senator 10<sup>th</sup> District



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Alex Kasser  
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Cathy Osten  
State Senator 19<sup>th</sup> District



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Pat Miller  
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Will Haskell  
State Senator 26<sup>th</sup> District