

Testimony of Tom Swan

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Before the Finance Public Health Committee

March 17, 2021

In support of

SB 1 AA EQUALIZING COMPRHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and other members of the Public Health Committee my name is Tom Swan, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG). On behalf of our thousands of members I want to thank you for raising SB1 AA EQUALIZING COMPRHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC and offer our strong support.

The COVID pandemic is a loud wakeup call about our need to address the totality of peoples' health and to address structural inequality in Connecticut. I want focus on several points specifically declaring racism a public health crisis. Standardizing the collection of race, ethnicity, and language date, and strengthening our community benefit regulations for hospitals.

While COVID has forced a greater focus on health disparities that is still inadequate. The discrepancies in infant mortality rates, life expectancy, percentage of uninsured, to the levels of diabetes and asthma we know disparities existed before COVID and will continue to be perpetuated after if we don't act boldly. We have to look at the structural issues behind these numbers and to acknowledge the role of racism and white supremacy in perpetuating this.

Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis

We strongly support the inclusion of the declaration of racism to be a public health crisis in this legislation. By explicitly calling out racisms role in creating these disparities is a first step in addressing this crisis. We agree with the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to examine racial disparities, for hospitals to conduct implicit bias training for their employees. As I said this is a step and we will be judged on how we address these findings going forward.

Standardize Data on Race, Ethnicity and Language

We strongly support this section of the bill. To develop plans and to monitor progress on our public health goals we must know this information. This REL data can inform policymakers, help us design more effective strategies, identify impact of environmental racism, and to ensure people have equal access to health care.

Community Benefits

CCAG testified on an earlier bill related to community benefits and believes we need develop standardized reporting requirements, guarantee meaningful participation including populations that face the greatest disparities and incorporate REL data.

Thank you for your time and consideration.