

S.B. No. 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

Public Health Committee
Franklin Ude
3/17/2021

Dear Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Franklin Ude and I live in South Windsor, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. No. 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

I strongly believe that racial equity should be a top priority for our communities. That is why I come before you today to make the case as to why racism must be declared a public health crisis in the State of Connecticut. This will be a critical first step, because we can begin to address this problem as a systemic and structural issue, rather than just the faults of individuals. If we can pass legislation addressing this issue, we can begin to root out these problematic structures that keep racism so deeply embedded in in our system.

Being a black man, I have seen the effects of racism on health outcomes in people friends, family as well as people I interact with in all aspects of my life. Systemic racism itself is a social determinant of health, creating inequities across all other social determinants of health such as housing, food, income, built environment and access to healthcare. In turn black people experience disproportionately high rates of infant mortality, asthma, cancer and heart and lung disease. We've also seen these inequities made worse by the COVID-19 Pandemic where we are seeing Blacks and Latinos experience higher rates of infection. Due to them making up a lot of the essential workforce and living in more crowded housing, coupled with the inequities they already face, the pandemic takes a more serious toll on them than their white counterparts.

I personally can attest to this based on what I have seen in my field of work. I currently work as a research assistant in a sickle cell clinic, where I interact with sickle cell patients on a regular basis. Due to the fact that this population is mainly Black and African American, they collectively experience racism and inequities in the social determinants of health, as I've mentioned before such as housing, food, and access to healthcare, and when they have a disease like sickle cell, management of their disease is much more burdensome since they may not have these basic necessities that have in impact on health outcomes. From these patients I've heard stories about longer wait times in the emergency room, being expected to have higher pain threshold, being labeled as drug seeking when in need of pain medication as well as lack of trust with their providers. The racism and social inequities that this populations faces, creates a greater burden of disease for a condition that is already debilitating and even deadly. I'm convinced that is this population wasn't predominantly Black and African American their situation would look very different.

Specifically, I strongly support the following components of S.B.1: declaring racism a public health crisis, because we can look at this as a structural issue, one that limits the ability to live well and thrive, then begin to dismantle system driven conditions that have a negative impact on health outcomes.

The pandemic did not create the deep racial inequities in our state, but it did in fact expose and exacerbate them. We hope it will move Connecticut to address them. This bill offers opportunities to dismantle components of systemic racism and move Connecticut closer to health equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B.1: An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.