



March 26, 2021

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Kenneth Barela, I live in Glastonbury, CT. I am writing to provide testimony in strong support of in support of H.B. No. 6662: "An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health." I serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Hispanic Health Council (HHC) and submit my testimony on behalf of this statewide, community-based organization. The Hispanic Health Council's mission is to improve the health and social well-being of Latinos and other diverse communities. Senate Bill 1056 is of major relevance to the health and well-being of the communities that we serve.

H.B. No. 6662 will make facilitate important progress toward intentionally acknowledging and addressing racial and ethnic inequities in our state. It will declare racism a public health crisis and create structures to embed anti-racism in policymaking. It will create a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health to convene cross-sector partners in the executive branch and create a strategic plan to eliminate health disparities. It would require the Commission to 1) engage with community members; 2) conduct studies and make recommendations on health care workforce diversity, environment health programs, and cultural humility trainings for students in health programs; and 3) report to the Connecticut General Assembly on the status of its work, progress towards its goals, and policy recommendations

Racism impacts health, as evidenced by inequities in maternal and infant health and death rates, cancer, asthma, and heart and lung diseases. In addition are the impact on health and mental health of police brutality, environmental racism, and unequal access to health care. HHC works daily with people throughout the state who disproportionately experience these conditions, and social determinants of health (SDH) that play a major role in causing them. Racism is one of those social determinants and must be addressed as such.

Across the country, at least 185 different entities have declared racism a public health crisis including the states of Michigan, Minnesota, Virginia, and Nevada by their Governor or General Assembly, as well as 20 municipalities in Connecticut! The declaration by the state of Connecticut of racism as a public health crisis is an essential first step towards implementing systemic changes needed to address it.!

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony regarding H.B. No. 6662, "An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health."

Sincerely,

Kenneth Barela, MBA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Hispanic Health Council