

# IN SUPPORT Testimony For Bill 2021 HB 6662 - An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

**Supriyo B. Chatterjee MSc MBA MA (Econ) - 26th March 2021**

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly –

My name is Supriyo Chatterjee and I live in West Hartford, Connecticut. I stand **IN SUPPORT of Bill 2021 HB 6662 - An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.**

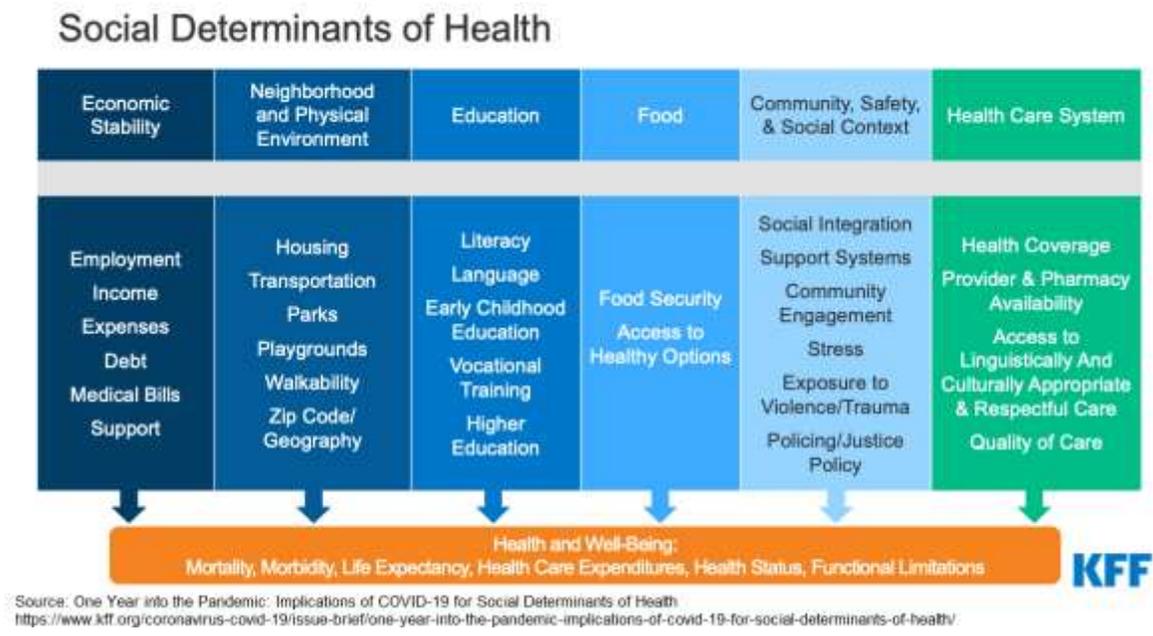
In Connecticut, people of color disproportionately suffer from maternal morbidity, infant mortality, asthma, diabetes, and other disparities. <sup>1</sup>

The disparities are more acute during the Covid-19 pandemic - from a recent article on Racial Ethnic Health Disparities<sup>2</sup>:

*“The importance of the racial and ethnic breakdown of those affected cannot be overemphasized and may also impact philanthropic initiatives reaching communities. The concern is that while there is an existing threat of an infectious disease that has the potential to infect and devastate many, the particularly vulnerable will experience a greater proportion of disease burden and social upheaval that includes increased mortality, limited health care access, economic collapse with loss of wages and housing, and an overall lack of resources and equity to sustain in a dynamic crisis.”*

## Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) as a source of disparities and racism

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) include factors like economic stability, education, neighborhood and physical environment, food, community and social support, and access to health care system (SDOH in figure below)<sup>3</sup>. There is extensive research that concludes that addressing SDOH is important for improving health outcomes and reducing health disparities.<sup>4</sup>

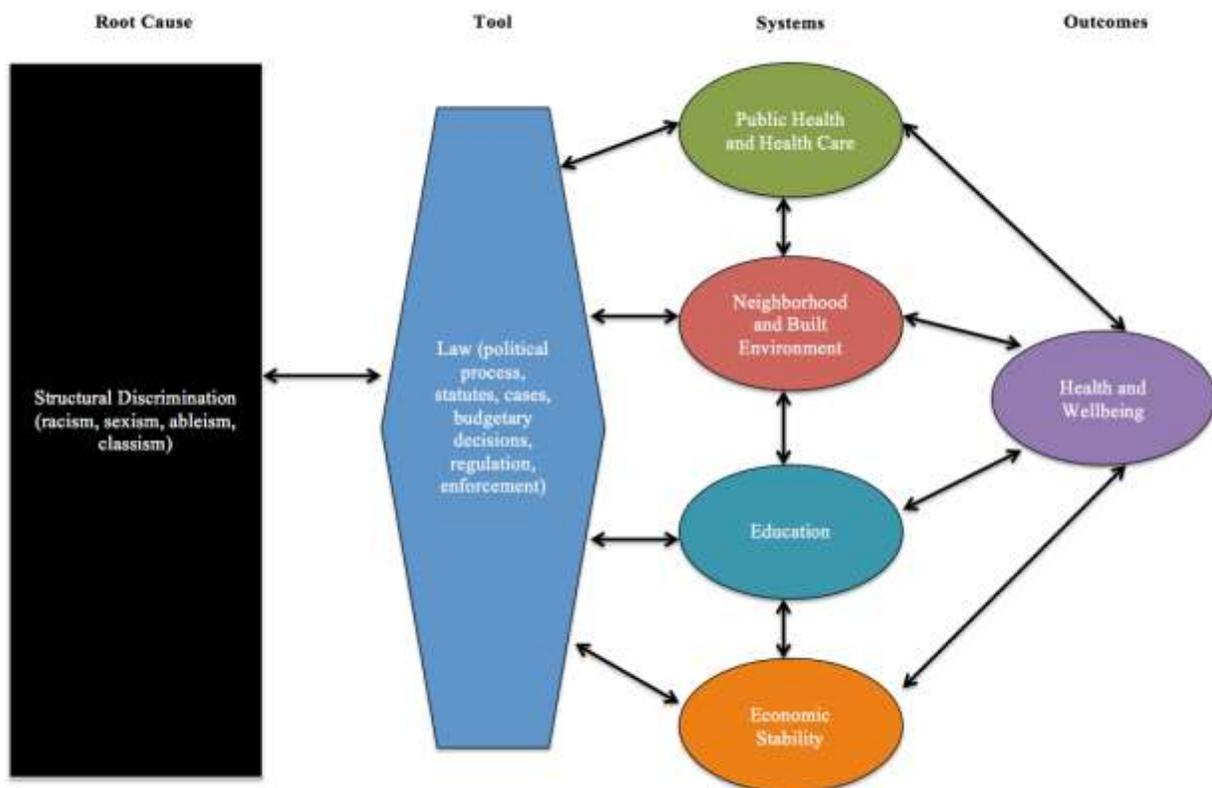


One established source is from the Federal program ‘Healthy People’ which formally concluded that social determinants of health (SDOH) are primarily responsible for racial health disparities<sup>5</sup>. These factors include social norms and attitudes (e.g., discrimination, racism, and distrust of government). From the American Public Health Association (APHA)<sup>6</sup> – “Racism may be intentional or unintentional. It operates at various levels in society. Racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health (like housing, education and employment) and is a barrier to health equity.”

While there is reluctance to identify racism as a root cause of racial health inequities – it also increasingly points to the high costs that it brings: Racial health disparities have an estimated \$175 billion in lost life years and \$135 billion per year in excess healthcare costs and lost productivity. These costs persist because of the failure to address their root cause: structural racism<sup>7</sup>.

### Addressing the root cause

Already many cities have commenced to address racism and the health disparities that they cause. More than 50 city declarations have put racism’s health impacts on par with disease and addiction<sup>8</sup>. Health organizations, school districts and other social service institutions are addressing them too. Recently, the city of New York has declared a racial-justice commission panel that will examine inequities and consider recommendations for changes to the city’s charter, including a reparations program<sup>9</sup>.



Revised SDOH Framework created by Ruqaiyah Yearby (2020)

Source: Structural Racism: The Root Cause of the Social Determinants of Health (Sept 2020)  
<https://blog.petriefrom.law.harvard.edu/2020/09/22/structural-racism-social-determinant-of-health/>

What is clearly needed is a revised framework for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) that would address the root cause and mitigate the racism and health disparities (shown in Revised SDOH Framework figure above). This can be done by policies and tools: These are political processes, statutes, cases, budgetary decisions, regulation, enforcements, and other structural changes<sup>10</sup>. The changes could call for a standardize collection of race, ethnicity, and primary language data and reporting<sup>11</sup> that can better assess the problems with precision and help solve the inequities with effective interventions.

The first step to achieve the above is by establishing a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health as Bill 2021 HB 6662 calls for and examining the underlying causes and institutions. Examinations of institutional failures that emanate the systemic racism and disparities in our public health systems.

**I thank you for this opportunity to testify IN SUPPORT of Bill 2021 HB 6662 - An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. I urge you to consider and passing the proposed bill which will ensure healthier people in our state.**

With thanks and sincerely,  
Supriyo B. Chatterjee MSc MBA MA (Econ)  
West Hartford, Connecticut  
26th March 2021

## References:

---

<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Department of Public Health – Health Disparities

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Workforce--Professional-Development/Office-of-Health-Equity/Health-Disparities>

<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 Pandemic: a Call to Action to Identify and Address Racial and Ethnic Disparities - J Racial Ethnic Health Disparities, April 2020

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7166096/>

<sup>3</sup> One Year into the Pandemic: Implications of COVID-19 for Social Determinants of Health - KFF 3/16/2021

<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/one-year-into-the-pandemic-implications-of-covid-19-for-social-determinants-of-health/>

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Healthy People 2020: Social Determinants of Health - HHS Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>.

<sup>6</sup> Racism and Health - American Public Health Association 2020

<https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health>

<sup>7</sup> Structural Racism: The Root Cause of the Social Determinants of Health - Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School

<https://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2020/09/22/structural-racism-social-determinant-of-health/>

<sup>8</sup> Dozens of City Governments Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis | Bloomberg 7/13/2020

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-13/dozens-of-cities-dub-racism-a-public-health-crisis>

<sup>9</sup> Racial-Justice Commission Will Examine Inequities in New York City | Wall Street Journal 3/23/2021

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/racial-justice-commission-will-examine-inequities-in-new-york-city-11616533967>

<sup>10</sup> ibid at 7.

<sup>11</sup> See my testimonial for CT Bill 2021 HB 6424 - An Act Revising Data Collection Requirements for Health Care Providers Connecting to the State-Wide Health Information Exchange

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/PHdata/Tmy/2021HB-06424-R000303-Chatterjee,%20Supriyo%20B.,%20MSc,%20MBA,%20MA-TMY.PDF>