

**H.B. No. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis
and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.**

Appropriations Committee
Stephanye R. Clarke, March 31, 2021

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

Hello, my name is Stephanye R. Clarke and I live in New London, Connecticut. I chair the New London Branch NAACP Health Committee; the Black Health Collective and I am a member of the Health Improvement Collaborative of Southeastern CT Coordinating Committee. I stand in support of **H.B.6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.**

Racism has been defined by Dr. Camara Jones as “a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value, based on the social interpretation of how one looks. It unfairly advantages and disadvantages individuals and communities.” If we are to meaningfully mitigate health inequities, we cannot ignore the role racism plays in their creation.

Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, age, learn, work, play and/or pray. They are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels; and are mostly responsible for health inequities (the unfair and avoidable differences in health status). Racism is woven throughout all these systems and action to dismantle systemic racism in all these systems is how we move towards health equity.

Racism meets all three criteria of a public health crisis (1) if it affects large numbers of people; (2) it threatens health over the long-term; and (3) it requires the adoption of large-scale solutions.

Racism plays a critical role in determining the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age, and it affects people’s access to quality/affordable housing, education, food, transportation, education, social and political capital, and other social determinants of health. Dr. David Williams, Professor of Public Health, African and African American Studies and Sociology at Harvard University, says that racial discrimination is linked to elevated risk of a broad range of diseases – even premature mortality.

Racism has negative mental and physical consequences such as depression, anxiety, hypertension, preterm birth, shortened life span and poor quality of life. Understanding and addressing racism from this public health perspective is crucial to eliminating racial and ethnic inequities, and to improving opportunity and well-being across communities.

Specifically, I strongly support **H.B.6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health** and respectfully recommend that the bill include staffing to create racial impact assessments on proposed policies. This will enable the Connecticut General Assembly to evaluate the potential for policies to promote equity or have a disparate impact.

The pandemic did not create the deep racial inequities in our state, but it can be an opportunity to address them. This bill takes steps to dismantle components of systemic racism and move Connecticut closer to health equity. This declaration will spur Connecticut to recognize racism as the public health crisis it is and address the

problem by embedding anti-racist principles in the way our state government works. This declaration is an essential first step towards the change that generations have sought for so long.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify 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.**

Respectfully,
Stephanye R. Clarke