



**Testimony from Paul Dworkin, MD- Pediatrician and Executive Vice President for  
Community Child Health at Connecticut Children's Medical Center  
to the Appropriations Committee  
Regarding HB 6662- *An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing  
the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*  
March 24, 2021**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and other esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my support regarding House Bill 6662, *An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*.

My name is Dr. Paul Dworkin and I serve as the Executive Vice President for Community Child Health at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. I wish to offer my support of this proposal because all children, regardless of the race, area code, or income level of their families deserve equal access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally competent healthcare.

Before commenting on the bill, I want to provide some background about the Office for Community Child Health (OCCH). At Connecticut Children's, we know that only about 10% of children's overall health and well-being is determined by the health care services they receive. Furthermore, 80 to 90% of our desired outcomes for children are driven by social, environmental, and behavioral factors. OCCH works to improve the social determinants of health such as housing, transportation, food and nutrition, and family support services. We know that strong families, healthy homes, and healthy communities build healthy children. The coronavirus pandemic has unfortunately only served to exacerbate many of the existing social and economic challenges facing families and we believe that the work we do within OCCH is now more important than ever.

Achieving health equity in Connecticut must specifically include health equity for all of our state's children. By prioritizing our youth, advancing policies that support their health and well-being, and increasing cultural sensitivities in care for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), we strengthen families, communities, and the state's future workforce.

We must acknowledge and boldly speak to the structural barriers rooted in racial inequality that have thus far prevented us from achieving health equity for our children. To that end, I support the proposal within the bill to declare racism a public health crisis and to establish a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. We would encourage the commission to include children's health issues in its work and subsequent recommendations for improving public health.

It is an unfortunate reality that children growing up in low-income communities experience poorer health outcomes than their peers in more affluent communities. COVID-19 has made these disparities all the more stark. Children are spending more time at home than ever before and, for some kids, that means increased exposures due to living in older homes that contain toxins and hazards like lead-based paint, mold, and unsafe windows and stairs that can lead to illness and injury. Many families will also be faced with the choice of "heat or eat" this winter, meaning they will have to choose between paying their heating bill and going grocery shopping. Many also struggle with access to affordable and healthy foods as well as safe outdoor spaces to exercise

and connect with nature. All of these factors, often referred to as the “social determinants of health,” strongly impact a child’s ability to grow, learn and succeed to their fullest potential.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee ([eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org](mailto:eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org)), Government Relations Associate.