



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Appropriations Committee
March 26, 2021**

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

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Liz Gustafson, and I am the State Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut. I testify in strong support of H.B. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health.

Connecticut has a long history of bipartisan support to protect and expand reproductive freedom, which means ensuring everyone regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic or immigration status has the ability to decide if, when or how to start or grow their families in safe and healthy communities. With that said, it would be negligent to deny the fact that our systems as we know them are built upon decades of racism, inequity and white supremacy, pushing access out of reach for many, particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous and other communities of color. Additionally, as we continue to navigate & understand the longer-term impacts COVID-19 has had on our communities, a harsh light has been cast on existing racial disparities and health inequities, which have only been further exacerbated by the ongoing public health crisis. **Make no mistake, sexual and reproductive healthcare needs do not stop during a global pandemic.** This is not only a matter of reproductive freedom, but H.B. 6662 is also a clear path we can & must take to begin addressing ongoing racial & reproductive *injustice*.

Declaring racism as a public health crisis is both a public acknowledgement of such, and also serves as a policy-led commitment to begin undoing the harm caused by burdensome barriers and gaps in access. Across the country, **at least 185 different entities have declared racism a public health crisis including the states of Michigan, Minnesota, Virginia, and Nevada as well as 20 municipalities in Connecticut.** Another component of H.B. 6662 is creation of the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health, which would be housed within the Executive Branch and would report to the Office of Policy and Management and the Public Health Committee, providing necessary oversight and reach to begin this essential work to address racial disparities in health (as outlined in

section 2k).

H.B. 6662 is a clear opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut stands with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis and **respectfully asks that the following recommendation be considered in this bill:**

1. Include staffing to create racial impact assessments on proposed policies. Allocate funding for 2 dedicated staff to conduct racial and ethnic impact statements on any proposed bill. Appropriate staffing will ensure officials have the information needed when considering policy proposals that could potentially promote equity or disproportionately impact people of color.

In closing, Connecticut is positioned to build upon its bipartisan history to protect and expand reproductive freedom, but will only truly begin to do so by ensuring we address ongoing harm caused by systemic racism and institutionalized barriers. While addressing the multiple crises we face is a complex and multifaceted process, acknowledging institutionalized racism and implementing policies & procedures that will begin to undue harm caused by systemic barriers is absolutely essential for our communities and our state's residents.

The pandemic did not create the deep racial inequities in our state, but it can be an opportunity to address them. H.B. 6662 is a clear step towards making the future we envision a reality, and provides Connecticut with a comprehensive approach that will allow our state to lead on behalf of racial & health equity. NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut urges committeemembers and the Connecticut General Assembly to vote favorably on this important bill. If you have any further questions, I can be reached at liz@prochoicect.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Liz Gustafson, MSW
State Director, NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut