

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

Appropriations Committee
Vanessa Monique Liles
March 26, 2021

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

My name is Vanessa Liles and I live in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I stand 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 Co-Project Director at PT Partners (PTP) and our mission is to recreate a PT Barnum Apartment community who works together to provide the tools to achieve the vision of PTP. The vision is to create a neighborhood working together where Resident Leaders are empowered to actively drive change to breakdown systemic and institutional oppression in their lives, their neighborhood, and the greater Bridgeport community.

As a Black woman, I personally experience the affect of systemic racism, daily, but for the low-income public housing community (LIPH) it is greater because there are multiple systems that weigh-in on their lives. Most immediately, LIPH residents, who are overwhelmingly women head-of-household and women of color, are faced with living in environmentally damaged areas, use over-crowded and under-resourced healthcare clinics, attend poorly performing schools without proper support staff because they are not wealthy and they are not wealthy because of this cyclical oppression resulting from racism. It disallows the realization of joy that can be found in just simply living in a world that affirms the humanity of Black and Indigenous people and other People of Color (BIPOC). It means that many in BIPOC communities have dedicated their lives to finding the balance between fighting a fight for equity for all and enjoying the beauty that can be found in the every day world. It means residents of PT Partners, in addition to living their personal lives, have taken on leadership roles to make sure residents of low-income housing are aware of their rights to demand proper health care when they go to the clinic or doctor's office because the medical system, like all systems, perpetuates disparity, and unchecked, harms BIPOC communities. It means that they push back against harmful housing policies that harm those who are least equipped with the means to fight a system. It means we have to do the extra-citizenship work to assert our humanity within the criminal justice system. It means we cannot assume our protection from harm; care and support are not practices we can expect from the justice system. Demands are the way we get justice and this should not be.

Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health would be a great step to address these issues with racism so it can be seen as everyone's issue. We are inextricably tied and need to move from racism as an individual act to understanding and addressing the true insidiousness nature of it before it further erodes the livelihood of so many of Connecticut's residents. When we did not declare drug use a public health crisis but instead chose to declare war on Black and Brown communities it led to the current opioid crisis, which is being treated as a public health crisis and provides resources for White communities. Let us not get this wrong and wait for the harm to spread even further before this type of body is created at the state level and meaningful address is attempted.

Specifically, we **strongly support** H.B.6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

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.

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.**

Sincerely,
Vanessa Monique Liles, Ph.D.