

**TESTIMONY OF DANIEL LIVINGSTON, SEBAC CHIEF NEGOTIATOR, AND JULIUS
PRESTON, MEMBER, SEBAC RACIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
REGARDING HOUSE BILL 6662
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 26, 2021**

Representative Walker, Senator Osten, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition, its 45,000 members, and its Racial Justice Committee, by Daniel Livingston, SEBAC Chief Negotiator, and Julius Preston a founding member of SEBAC's Racial Justice Committee. We strongly support HB 6662 as well as other legislative efforts to recognize systemic racism as the public health crisis that it is, and to seek solutions. We thank the Committee for raising this important bill and for holding this public hearing today.

The persistence of racism, and other forms of invidious discrimination is the greatest stain on our great American democratic experiment, and the greatest obstacle against true progress for all of Connecticut's families. It puts a shadow on so many aspects of the lives and opportunities of our communities, from housing, to education, to economic advancement, from safe and livable communities and cities to rewarding and productive careers, and yes on employment in public service. But as the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. teaches; "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman." And as the pandemic has made still more clear, such injustice is rampant, both in our own state and in our nation.

Black and brown people have been far more likely to become infected with COVID-19, and if infected, more likely to get seriously ill or die from it. Black and brown workers are far more likely to be in jobs where they can't telecommute or social distance during the pandemic, thus risking their own health and their families. Inside and outside of public service, too many workers have faced too many risks, for themselves and their families, too many have gotten ill, and of course far too many have died. A terrible price has been paid by so many working families, and especially by those who are black or brown.

The pandemic, of course, only shines a brighter light on racial disparities in health which due to systemic racism far preceded COVID-19. White families are more likely to be insured for health care, and less likely to experience race and cultural barriers to health care regardless of whether they have insurance. They are less likely to live in urban communities where the air is less safe, and healthy food more scarce, and if they do live in urban areas, they are more likely to have the financial resources to overcome such scarcity. None of this is right. None of this is written in stone. All of it can be overcome, but it takes long-term, committed efforts by communities of all colors, and by the public institutions that represent all of us.

Many of the Coalition's members play critical roles in trying to improve public health for all our communities, and particularly for communities of color, and they experience firsthand all the obstacles systemic racism place in the way of success for those communities. They provide mental health crisis support, care for the elderly or disabled, early childhood, primary, and higher education to many, especially to communities of color, and they see firsthand the challenges people face and the inadequacy of our government's response to those challenges.

These obstacles are only exacerbated by the fact that as an employer, our state government is far from immune from our society's systemic racism. A recent report by the State Comptroller shows that primarily because of unequal distribution among the types of state employment, the average black state employee makes \$10,000 per year less than the average white state employee. Our state government needs to stand up and lead, to take this historical moment to say "enough is enough. We will no longer tolerate the intolerable."

HB 6662, not just with its declaration, but with its emphasis on finding active anti-racist solutions is a good first step towards what must be a conscious, sustained, and unrelenting collective fight for the kind of Connecticut all of us -- of every race, creed, and color -- will be proud of. We thank the Committee for its leadership on this critically important issue and urge favorable action on HB 6662.