



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Member Miner, Ranking Member France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am testifying in support of House Bill 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

The ACLU-CT is an organization dedicated to racial equity in civil society. One deeply disturbing way that racism shows up is in the health care people can access and in the health outcomes for people of color, particularly Black people.¹ COVID-19 has highlighted the stark disparity in health outcomes for BIPOC,² even when all other factors are equal³ – a result of deep systemic racism. In Connecticut, for example, Black residents are four times as likely as white residents to have diabetes-related lower-extremity amputations, and twice as likely to die from

¹ See Timothy Cunningham et al, “Vital Signs: Racial Disparities in Age-Specific Mortality among Blacks or African Americans – United States, 1999-2015.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, May 5, 2017, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6617e1.htm>.

² Ezekiel J. Emanuel & Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, “5 ways the health-care system can stop amplifying racism.” *The Atlantic*, Sept. 24, 2020, *available at* <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/09/how-health-care-can-stop-amplifying-racism/616454/>.

³ “Minorities more likely to receive lower-quality health care, regardless of income and insurance coverage,” *National Academy of Medicine*, Mar. 202, 2002, *available at* <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2002/03/minorities-more-likely-to-receive-lower-quality-health-care-regardless-of-income-and-insurance-coverage>.

diabetes.⁴ This bill recognizes these effects and makes initial steps to changing them – an important substantive and symbolic move.

Particularly, declaring racism a public health crisis is an essential message to send. As at least 17 municipalities in Connecticut who have made similar declarations⁵ agree, it is important to acknowledge the scope of the problem by recognizing “there is physical, emotional and actual trauma happening around racism.”⁶ The bill does not stop with this important messaging, though, but establishes a commission on racial equity in public health to document and make recommendations to reduce the effects of racism on public health. This commission is tasked with considering and reducing racism in the environment, affordable housing, infrastructure, public health, health care access, social services, sustainable communities, and climate change. These areas get at some of the clear-cut and less-obvious ways that racism affects health. Finally, by tasking the Office of Higher Education with studying and making recommendations regarding recruitment and retention of people of color in health care fields and cultural humility educational in health care curricula, this bill will help ensure that the next generation of health care workers will have more diversity and more wisdom regarding they ways racism shows up in health care.

House Bill 6662 is an important acknowledgement of one of the most harmful effects of racism – public health. It also includes some ways to study and gain information to make good policy in the future. We support House Bill 6662 as the first step in a long journey to ending systemic racism in healthcare and health outcomes. We urge this Committee to support it as well.

⁴ See “Create a community without racism,” YWCA Hartford, *available at* <https://www.ywcahartford.org/advocacy/create-a-community-without-racism.html>.

⁵ Dominique Moody, “Towns and cities make strides after declaring racism a public health crisis.” NBC CT, Oct. 7, 2020, *available at* <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/towns-and-cities-make-strides-after-declaring-racism-as-a-public-health-crisis/2343184/>.

⁶ Jenna Carlesso, “Connecticut towns are declaring racism a public health crisis. Advocates want the state to follow.” CT Mirror, Jun. 24, 2020, *available at* <https://ctmirror.org/2020/06/24/connecticut-towns-are-declaring-racism-a-public-health-crisis-advocates-want-the-state-to-follow/>.