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**March 26, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Appropriations Committee**

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**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun, and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated antipoverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am writing to express our support for House Bill 6662, *An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood care and education, asset development, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Although Connecticut ranks as one of the healthiest states in the country, a recent report by the Connecticut Health Foundation¹ shows major health disparities by race and ethnicity are across the state. Key findings include:

- Black and Hispanic state residents are much more likely to suffer severe consequences of conditions including asthma and diabetes.
- Black women are much more likely than white women to have a baby who dies before turning one.
- Black state residents die at a faster rate than white residents.

The report also reveals large gaps in other factors related to health outcomes. This includes stable housing, reliable transportation, and not having enough money to put food on the table. The conditions, or social determinants of

¹ Becker, Arielle Leven. *Health Disparities in Connecticut: Causes, Effects, and What We Can Do*. Connecticut Health Foundation, January 2020. Available at: <https://www.cthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Health-disparities-in-Connecticut.pdf>

health, where people are born, live, work, learn, and play, drive these disparities as well.

One of the most startling findings of the report shows that while socioeconomic factors do play a large role in the issue of health disparities, research reveals that they are partly caused by other factors specific to a person's race and ethnicity – including unequal treatment in health care and the physiological effects of experiencing racism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further brought these deep-seated issues to the forefront, and the state must take action to address them. Connecticut's Community Action Agency Network strongly supports this bill, which takes steps to dismantle components of systemic racism and move Connecticut closer to health equity.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. 6662. Thank you for raising this important bill, and for your time and consideration.