

Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing - March 26, 2021

Testimony of PoliticaCT 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.*

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Janée Woods Weber and I live in West Hartford, Connecticut. I submit this testimony on behalf of PoliticaCT, whose mission is to build a more progressive Connecticut through issue advocacy.

We, the Board of Directors and over 1200 members of PoliticaCT, support House Bill No. 6662: *An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.* We do so in recognition of the truth that racism as a public health crisis was not born from the pandemic but has been an ongoing crisis for centuries within Connecticut and the rest of the United States since the genocide of native and indigenous people and the enslavement of African people for the economic and social benefit of white people, especially wealthy white men. The conditions of the pandemic have exacerbated the longstanding, deeply entrenched institutional and structural racial disparities impacting Black communities and other communities of color, especially Black women and women of color.

White supremacy, systemic racism and institutionalized racism are real and are present in every facet of our communities and government, shaping the conditions under which we all live and creating unjust obstacles for Black and brown people to experience physical and mental well-being, economic security, and the ability to live free from oppression. Racism has a documented negative impact on mental and physical health. The racial disparities in public health are shocking and so numerous that we could create a list that is pages long. A few examples¹ are:

- Babies born to Black mothers are FOUR times more likely to die before their first birthday, compared to babies born to white mothers.
- Black and brown communities are TWO times more likely to experience food insecurity.
- Black people are TWO times more likely to die from diabetes, compared to white people.
- Communities of color are TWO times more likely to go without medical care, a situation which has become even more dire considering the realities of the pandemic.

¹ Towards Health Equity in Connecticut (DataHaven, June 2020), available at <https://ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/DataHaven%20Health%20Equity%20Connecticut%20061820.pdf>

In many ways, Black and brown women bear the deepest burdens of health inequity due to racism, sometimes with deadly outcomes. The maternal mortality rate for Black women is 48 average deaths per 1,000 live births, a rate that is more than THREE times that for white women.

For these reasons, we join with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis and respectfully request that this bill be amended to include:

1. A review and reform of the legislative process to improve public accessibility
2. Mechanisms to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race
3. Staffing to create timely racial impact assessments on proposed policies, which will enable the Connecticut General Assembly to evaluate the potential for policies to promote equity or to have a disparate impact.

The people of Connecticut cannot wait any longer for swift, decisive action to be taken toward dismantling the racism that threatens the health of our Black communities and communities of color. We urge this Committee to pass H.B. No. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Janée Woods Weber
President, PoliticaCT