

Testimony of Brittney Lynn Yancy

HB 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health

March 26, 2021

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

My name is Brittney Yancy, and I live in Vernon, Connecticut. I submit this testimony in support of **HB 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health**. I also submit this statement as a member of the following three organizations committed to declaring racism a public health emergency: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Epsilon Omicron Omega Chapter, United State of Women Greater Hartford, and CT Black Women.

In the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing inequities and made it even more difficult for the most vulnerable in our communities. From senior citizens to predominately Black and Latinx communities, COVID-19 continues to spotlight the current and historical racialized and gendered disproportionality of health outcomes in the U.S. While COVID may be novel, the deep rooted impact of racism is a long term public health crisis that has impacted BIPOC for centuries. But specifically, research shows that because of racism black Americans are:

- More likely to die at an early age.
- Less likely to receive adequate emergency care.
- 50% more likely to have high blood pressure.
- Twice as likely to die from heart disease.
- Less likely to receive adequate diagnostic care.
- Less likely to obtain a prescription for analgesics or antibiotics.
- Three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications.
- Twice as likely to have babies that are underweight.
- Twice as likely to die within the first year of life.

These disparities are alarming, but the real issue is not the statistic, but the human life that informs the statistic. This committee has the power to listen to our state's marginalized and oppressed communities, especially poor, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled women and gender-non-conforming people, and center their lived experiences to address this crisis.

But the data collection is equally important. In order to make change, it is important to disaggregate the data and ensure it does not rest on simple black and white linear studies. Instead, the Commission's work should employ a robust intersectional framework. That means, the chair of the Commission should have experience in intersectional research methods. I also recommend that "Racism" and other key terms are clearly defined in the bill in order to effectively and appropriately find solutions and institute a matrix. According the American Public Health Association, racism is defined as:

“A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources.”

This type of definition falls short of a clear definitive statement that addresses the intersection of racism, privilege, and power. We must define racism and systemic racism in the bill in order to address police brutality, redlining, black maternal crisis, criminalization of our black children, poverty, the wealth gap, and health disparities.

Ultimately, this bill is about humanity. It takes steps to dismantle components of systemic racism and move Connecticut closer to health equity. An assessment of the history of systemic racism in Connecticut and its implication on health outcomes of our most vulnerable should be an important investment of the Legislature. This proposed Commission can lay the groundwork for more intentional action and ultimately, policy change. However, that can only happen if the members of the Commission represent the people, and not compromised by only politicians, academics, and health professionals. This bill can open new avenues to acknowledge racism as a life-and-death problem. Subsequently, the efforts proposed in this bill need to include all stakeholders’ voices, which will lead to policy changes and targeted solutions that benefit all.

In closing, 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.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Brittney Yancy
Vernon, Connecticut