



Testimony 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

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Thank you for the opportunity for Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut to testify in strong support of House Bill 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

At Universal Health Care Foundation, we envision health care that takes excellent care of all of us when we are sick, helps to keep us healthy, and does not threaten our financial security. We believe that health care should put people first and be accountable to provide quality care for everyone regardless of income, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language of preference, immigration status, and geography.

We support the declaration of racism as a public health crisis – we know that racism and all the forms in which it manifests threaten the health, well-being and lives of Black and brown communities that are part of the fabric of our state.

Racism meets all three criteria of a public health crisis:

1. Racism affects large numbers of people;
2. Racism threatens health over the long term; and
3. Racism requires the adoption of large-scale solutions.

The pandemic is one example of how racism is a public health crisis. Black and Latino residents experience higher rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths, because they are more likely to work in “essential” frontline jobs, live in more crowded housing and suffer from health conditions that can make COVID-19 infection more deadly. These circumstances are due to decades and centuries of income inequality and discrimination in areas like education and housing.

Black and brown communities consistently have structural barriers when it comes to their health. Black and brown people are less likely to have health insurance and more likely to encounter implicit bias in their interactions with health care providers. Both of these could have deadly results. Lack of insurance often means that people are not receiving care, especially preventive care and care that could identify serious health problems early. This could lead to early death from preventable causes. Implicit bias in interactions with the health care system can also be fatal – if a Black or brown person is

not taken seriously by their doctors, they may not get appropriate treatment. This can also lead to preventable death.

Black and brown people are also more likely to suffer health disparities – for example: high Black maternal and infant death rates, inequities in cancer, asthma, heart and lung diseases, and struggles with deteriorating mental and physical health. Add to that police brutality and environmental racism and it is clear that racism is a public health crisis. Many of these inequities are a life or death matter, reducing the lifespan of Black and brown people.

It doesn't have to be this way – we can examine our policies, identify where there is racism, and pass new policy to address it. By declaring racism a public health crisis, Connecticut owns the circumstances for what they are – an emergency – and the declaration can create real action.

Declaring racism as a public health crisis is only one step in the journey to making our state anti-racist. There must be action that aligns with this declaration. We must also pass anti-racist policy, ensure our institutions and systems operate under and espouse anti-racist values, and dismantle racism in our culture. That is why we support the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health that would be created under this bill.

The Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health would bring together cross-sector members of the Executive Branch to create a strategic plan to eliminate health disparities. This is what it will take – working across silos – to address racism. We applaud the Commission's continuance until certain metrics are reached and certain disparities are addressed. We must maintain the Commission however long it takes to deal with racism in our state.

Racism is an insidious enemy, embedded in our society. We must do everything we can, use every tool we have at our disposal, and root out racism in all its forms – structural and interpersonal. The trauma of racism impacts all of us, but our Black and brown communities most of all. Now that we know better, we must do better.

Thank you for your time.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable, equitable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.