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Testimony before the Public Health Committee

Wednesday, February 21st, 2007

10.00 AM in Room 1D of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and ranking members of this Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis and I am the Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The Commission is a non partisan state agency committed to advocating on behalf of African-Americans in the state. Today the Commission testifies in support of the following bills.

Raised Bill (RB) 1097 – An act expanding eligibility under the breast and cervical cancer early detection treatment referral program.

And

SB 1033 – An act providing resources for early detection, diagnosis and treatment of lung cancer

The Commission has voiced its concerns in earlier testimony before this Committee for the need for affordable health insurance coverage for all

Connecticut's citizens. We recognize that there are many in the state that have no health insurance to cover even basic routine medical screenings. For instance breast cancer screening is urgently needed in African American communities yet is inaccessible to many who don't fall within the prescribed income guidelines. Expanding eligibility requirements will make it more affordable to those who don't meet the income guidelines. Nationally it is estimated that there will be a 40,460 female deaths from cancer in 2007.¹ Most of these women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in its advanced stages; as a result will have shorter survival times. In Connecticut African-American females experienced a 28.6 percent death rate per 100,000 in the years 2000 through 2003.² This is a higher rate than any other group experiences. However we also know that with regular mammogram screenings many of these deaths could have been prevented. According to the Institute of Medicine, routine screening in clinical trials resulted in a 25 to 30 percent decrease in breast cancer mortality rates among women between the ages of 50 and 70.³

In response to SB 1033 lung cancer survival rates are equally disturbing for African-Americans. The lung cancer incidence rate among African-American men is more than 50 percent higher than their white male counterparts even though their exposure to cigarette smoking a primary risk factor for lung cancer is lower.⁴ Again it is proven that early detection and screening are critical in reversing these trends, as such the Commission is supportive of efforts as outlined in this bill in addressing these disparities. In view of these findings we ask that the legislature take action in implementing these bills so many more lives are saved.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify

¹ National Cancer Institute, *Breast Cancer*

² American Cancer Society, *Death Rates for Selected Cancers in African-American Males and Females, by State, 2000-03*

³ Institute of Medicine, *Mammography and Beyond*

⁴ American Lung Association, *Lung Cancer and African-Americans*