

**Testimony to the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
Edith Pestana, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities**

April 3, 2014

Good Afternoon Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, Senator Fasano, Representative Camillo and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Edith Pestana and I have served on the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) from 1999 to present. I am honored to be nominated by Governor Dannell P. Malloy for a new appointment to the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities and I am pleased to appear before you today.

I received my BA and MS from Rutgers University. During this time I tutored and taught problem solving courses to students from inner city schools with academic deficiencies in the sciences and math. I was also a science docent at the Newark Museum for inner city children and persons with intellectual disabilities. I moved to Houston, Texas in the mid 1980's and worked in environmental consulting traveling extensively across the country where I first became aware of the environmental inequities in lower socioeconomic and minority communities.

In 1988, I moved to Connecticut and subsequently received a MPH from Yale Medical School. In 1990, I began working at the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) as an epidemiologist where I was responsible for investigating the potential for human exposures to toxic chemicals as they relate to the incidence of cancer and other diseases. I also provided support to the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and reviewed and provided comments on the State's Lead Poisoning Prevention Regulations. During my employment at DPH I became interested in the environmental justice movement and the health disparities of racial and ethnic minority groups in Connecticut and in the US. In 1993 the Department of Environmental Protection invited me to join a workgroup to discuss the environmental justice issue.

Since 1994, I have been with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection as the first Administrator of the Environmental Justice Program. In this capacity I developed, planned and implemented the oldest continuous environmental justice program in the country. The agency's policy states "no segment of the population should, because of its racial or economic makeup bear a disproportionate share of the risks and consequences of environmental pollution or be denied equal access to environmental benefits." The program's responsibilities include increasing public outreach and education; decreasing language barriers; indentifying communities at risk of exposure to

pollutants; and collaborating with state and local health agencies and academic institutions to remediate potential pollution sources and decrease health disparities in Connecticut. The program has also collaborated with the Yale Peabody Museum in celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 's Legacy of Environmental and Social Justice for 18 years. This free family celebration of environmental and civil rights is held on the weekend of Martin Luther King's birthday and attracts over 5,000 participants each year.

I have served on several advisory boards and committees, including the Environment and Housing subcommittee for the Connecticut Lead Poisoning Elimination Task Force, the State Housing Task Force, the State of Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the State Health Improvement Planning Coalition, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council and Yale Medical School's Adopt-A-Doc Program, a pediatric residency training program designed to enhance the quality of culturally effective care.

For the past 16 years I have served on the CHRO. During this time, I have contributed to the review of CHRO statutes and regulations, participated in fact-finding hearings regarding state agencies, Connecticut's prisoners in Virginia prisons and the hiring practices of local school districts. Most recently, I have supported the staff at Town Hall meetings on racial profiling that are scheduled to be held throughout the state.

Lastly, the Commission's staff continue to inspire my dedication to human and civil rights. They are intelligent, dedicated, hardworking, passionate and a pleasure to work with. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I appreciate your attention and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.