Hispanic Health Council

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Dear Senator Bye and Senator Walker,

My name is Jose Ortiz and I am the President and CEO of the Hispanic Health Council, located at 175 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106. Our mission is to improve the health and social well-being of Latinos and other diverse communities. On behalf of the Hispanic Health Council, I appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony to present reasons why the Commission on Health Equity (CHE) must not be eliminated. Elimination of the CHE is presented in Sections 32 and 33 of the Governor's Bill 17.

CHE's purpose is to affect legislation that will improve health outcomes for all of Connecticut's residents. Unfortunately, there are barriers to equal enjoyment of good health based on race, ethnicity, national origin, linguistic ability, level of ability/disability, geographic area of residence, and sexual affectional minorities. An analysis conducted by the Connecticut Department of Public Health concluded that for health disparities experienced by the Black population alone, the cost to Connecticut is between $500 million and $650 million annually. (Poulin S, Cost of Disparity Analysis-presentation-Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2014, http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hems/health_equity/ct_costdisparity_apr2014_web.pdf) In order to eliminate those barriers, changes are needed in how health care and related services are delivered. One needed change is that all state agencies and care providers should provide culturally competent and linguistically appropriate care, including the adoption of the National Standards for culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS Standards). In addition to service delivery, in order to achieve health equity in Connecticut, policy changes are needed to impact the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.

CHE is an independent entity that has the unique capacity to compel state agencies and service providers to assure delivery of culturally and linguistically competent care and to address health disparities, toward the achievement of health equity in Connecticut. The impact of CHE's work includes improved well-being for Connecticut's population, and associated cost-savings for the state's budget. As such, CHE should be reinstated, with a budget, in order to hire the necessary staff to achieve the above-mentioned outcomes and benefits.

Thank you for your consideration.