

Testimony in favor of HB 6662, AN ACT DECLARING RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

Senator Catherine A. Osten (Co-Chair)

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Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee

My name is Alan Benford, and I am a resident of Manchester, Connecticut. I am a member of Unitarian Universalist Society: East, and I am active with the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), which acts on several fronts to dismantle racism in our culture. I am writing in favor of HB 6662, AN ACT DECLARING RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

Two of the principles of my Unitarian Universalist faith are to affirm and promote (1) the inherent worth and dignity of every person; and (2) justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Loving our neighbors as we love ourselves is fundamental to Christianity, and has parallels in other world religions. The existence of institutional and systemic racism in our nation and our state are direct contradictions to these principles, so I am compelled to work to eradicate racism, and in particular its impact on public health. Hence my testimony in favor of the bill.

Systemic and structural racism play a large role in determining the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and affect people's access to quality housing, education, food, transportation, political power, and other social determinants of health. Racism also has negative mental and physical health consequences such as, depression, anxiety, hypertension, preterm birth, shortened life span and poor quality of life. Understanding and addressing racism from this public health perspective is crucial to eliminating racial and ethnic inequities, and to improving opportunity and well-being across communities.

Creating a commission which has the mandate to investigate, educate and make proposals to respond to the widespread effects of racism in Connecticut is long overdue. The harm of racism cannot be measured solely in dollars, although the costs of a commission must be for budget purposes. Creating a weak commission will only be wasting the funds. A robust commission is mandatory, and the funding must be adequate to the task.

Racism has been declared a public health crisis in 6 states, 182 municipalities, entities, and organizations, including 20 municipalities in Connecticut. I find it ironic that the Virginia State Legislature recently made the public declaration of racism as a public health crisis, and Connecticut has not. Virginia is the location of the capitol of the former Confederacy, and Connecticut is alleged to be a progressive state. It is of the greatest significance that the CGA pass and fund HB 6662. Our community cannot allow racism to continue. This commission is a step in the right direction.