



March 26th, 2021

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of HB. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health Crisis

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of HB. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health Crisis. Black and Brown United in Action stands in solidarity with Health Equity Solutions and other community partners in acknowledging and working toward ending Connecticut's longest pandemic, racism.

To the fugitive slave fleeing a life of bondage, the North was a land of freedom. Or so he or she thought. Upon arriving there, the fugitive found that, though they were no longer slaves, neither were they free. The North may have emancipated its slaves, but it was not ready to treat the Black and Brown people as citizens. . . or sometimes even as human beings. Northern racism grew directly out of slavery and the ideas used to justify the institution. The bottom line was that for white people in Connecticut, no matter how poor or degraded they were, they knew there was a class of people below them. Poor whites were considered superior to Black and Brown people, simply by virtue of being white. Because of this, most identified with the rest of the white race and defended the institution of slavery. Working class whites did this even though slavery did not benefit them directly and was in many ways against their best interests.

The concepts of "black" and "white" did not arrive with the first Europeans and Africans, but grew on American soil. On the eve of the Revolution, Connecticut had the largest number of slaves (6,464) in New England. Jackson Turner Main, surveying Connecticut estate inventories, found that in 1700 one in 10 inventories included slaves, rising to one in 4 on the eve of the Revolution. Between 1756 and 1774, the proportion of slave to free in Connecticut increased by 40 percent. All the principal families of Norwich, Hartford, and New Haven were said to have one or two slaves. By 1774, half of all the ministers, lawyers, and public officials owned slaves, and a third of all the doctors. But Connecticut's large slave population apparently was based in the middle class.

COVID-19 has made the real, realer. The fact is, race equity was passé prior to the pandemic which heightened the need to resolve one of Connecticut's longest standing issues. What the pandemic made more obvious is that the Black and Brown people in Connecticut live in a strange state of semi-freedom. While there are many ambiguous laws which allude to accessibility, acceptance and inclusivity for Black and Brown people, in reality much of these are Legally Allowed White Supremacists ways of maintaining control. The reality is that in the state of Connecticut Black and Brown people still face race issues accessing COVID-19 pre and post care, being able to exercise their right to vote, being treated equally and fairly on the job, in the school system, in land and property matters, and from police and incarceration.

As previously mentioned, Black and Brown people continually face a plethora of race prejudices which has hindered their economic growth, limited their inclusivity in key processes and set boundaries on their access to opportunity. The modern slaves are barely earning a living, restricted to menial job opportunities, paying

exuberant rents while residing next to large institutions such as Yale University, poor diets due to rising food costs, lack access to proper education and resources including Black and Brown non-profits, teachers and social workers, continuously being subjected to on the job bullying and white tyrants who are legally allowed to abuse their power, while always trying to run away from the every present knee on the neck from police with the ultimate whipping post being incarceration with solitary confinement. Black and Brown people, like their slave ancestors are traded as budget lines on the white led non profit's budget, have to learn key skills from their elders including how and where to vote.

While there are white people who claim to empathize with the diaspora, some show up to rallies, some wave flags, some say they respect Black and Brown lives but few truly recognize the diaspora for what it is. The reality is, the exploitation never stopped. Many white people used their participation in rallies as a means of 'apology', a way of 'solidarity', but few marched to their jobs, or to legislators, or schools, or to real estate companies or state leadership demanding for Black and Brown people to be paid and treated equally. Most show solidarity as a way of self validation, ignoring the fact that by speaking on top of Black and Brown voices, they have done exactly what their predecessors did, take over for self sake as opposed to challenging white supremacy, demanding and expecting for Black and Brown people to be able to voice their concerns, share their woes, fight for their freedom using their voice and presence.

Right here in state governance meetings, many oppressive chains are laid on Black and Brown people which substantiate the need for HB. 6662. The fact that not even during a global health pandemic no accommodations have been made for those who have limited english proficiency or need language access during public hearings, there is no closed caption or sign language - both are forms of government censorship and both demonstrate how ingrained racist ways are into daily Connecticut lives. Another fact is having to fight for domestic workers, and the working poor people, most of whom are Black or Brown, who have carried the Connecticut economy throughout the pandemic to be paid fairly, to not have their job security and income threatened, to receive benefits including affordable healthcare and tax credits are other indications of how normalized racism is in this state given that the majority who are deprived of these basic essential needs are Black and Brown people. In truth, you cannot look past an inch of Connecticut and without recognizing the need to declare racism a public health crisis as it has been normalized and evident in various tones including pay differentials between races, job opportunities and advancement, policing, media, land, property and business ownership.

Recognizing racism as a public health crisis goes beyond holding up a sign and shouting out that Black and Brown lives matter. Resilience is a characteristic passed down through ancestry, through Black and Brown blood lines who endured and survived mental, physical and emotional torture. Taking a look at contemporary New Haven, where the City hall resides next university walls put together by slaves, a green which serves as a main bus stop for all including elderly and disabled, and students, most of whom are Black or Brown which is also a 'home' for the homeless and laden with crack pipes and syringes. Many of the bus stops are dirty, and as riders go by the mall they see a slew of white students, business professionals and residents enjoying the shops and scenery which they cannot afford. As the drive goes into Newhallville, it is apparent who resides where, as apparent from the large family homes on one end compared to the scrunched up, multi family homes which house many Black and Brown families. If you had driven down Dixwell avenue a couple weeks ago, riding by the clinic which is in the center of a working community filled with Black and Brown people struggling to survive enough not to be in full poverty, you would have seen scores of white people lining up to enter the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center for their COVID-19 vaccine, many of whom who were not residents of the area but were able to get an appointment by double booking slots. The scene looked similar to when Christopher Columbus returned to his most notorious discovery - the United States. You will notice as you drive around Newhallville that corner stores and liquor stores are more present than grocery or retail stores and many Black and Brown residents reside in multi family homes which they do not own either because they do not have the financial resources or access to information to make them home or property owners. You will see several non profits led by white people, who base their budgets on the 'needs' of Black and Brown people despite not recruiting or hiring Black and Brown leadership or hiring Black and Brown people to work the lesser paid, more 'hands on' work - field work. You may see a Black or Brown person being addressed by a white police officer,

who has backup on the way, another white officer. You will hear the laughter of Black and Brown children who use their imagination to entertain themselves. You will see Black and Brown elders sitting on their front porch, observing the Black and Brown community before them, reminiscing about their younger years and how much hope of liberation and true equity and inclusion they had for themselves and their community. You may even see a Black and Brown couple romancing each other, sharing their hopes and dreams, vying to do right despite the odds. You will see one or two Black and Brown youth, off to the side on their own, watching their peers, taking in the dirty walls, foggy air and car filled streets, contemplating on places they want to visit, careers they want to pursue, ways to they can envision themselves living off the limited field. You will see a Black or Brown parent pulling up to their house, hurrying their children inside so they can eat and do their homework before the parent runs off to another job, hustling to make ends meet somehow. You will smell the hope, dreams, despair, anger, frustration and overall oppression in the air as you ride through Newhallville.

By now you have heard testimony on why Black and Brown people are not paid equitably, are not treated fairly on the job, and are denied opportunity. You should know that there are tactics used within white led businesses, including white led non profits which prohibit the growth and advancement of Black and Brown people which includes misuse of labor laws, particularly performance reviews to ‘whiplash’ Black and Brown employees, berating their performance and antagonizing them by underrating their knowledge, skills and abilities to justify little to no pay increase. You should know by now that even after the Civil Rights Act was passed, voter suppression is a strategic tactic used to silence the Black and Brown voice via limited voting access and candidate suppression. You should know by now that George Floyd’s cry for his mother, the knee on his neck was and has been felt by any and every Black and Brown person who has been policed by white people. You should know by now that to date, too many Black and Brown lives have been lost to the COVID-19 global health pandemic because the fieldwork and research has always ignored accessibility to medical care in Black and Brown communities. You should know by now that the lack of language access and restrictions placed on Black and Brown people who have limited English proficiency has systematically censored their voice from being heard. You know some, if not many of the Black and Brown lives described, they have carried the economy on their backs throughout this pandemic and even before, they have had their education resources severely reduced, they have had to struggle to remain a hairline above poverty, they have cleaned your houses, driven your buses, delivered your mail, collected your trash, styled your hair, served your food, cared for your loved one, stocked your favorite grocery’s shelf, provided security services at buildings and property - they have and continue to put in the field work and the few who get to be inside are fully aware of the limits to their greatness, because they know, as their ancestry shows, the house slave can only go so far, they cannot lead the house within which white supremacy exists so they exist in the premise of semi freedom, content with not being treated like a field slave.

It does not matter how many books you have read, how many donations you have made, how many signs you have felt, if your skin is not melanated, if you check off as white or caucasian, you are oblivious to what freedom, equity and inclusion really means to Black and Brown lives. Black and Brown people are more than servants, they are visionaries, they are brave and they have and continue to contribute to economic growth and development into communities within which they are covertly and systematically restricted in growth and development. Black and Brown United in Action urges you to recognize what is, which is, we, Black and Brown people are not free, are not treated equally, are not paid fairly, are severely underrated, hugely exploited and are tired of being perceived and received as second class citizens. Picture if you will, a state of Connecticut without a single Black and Brown person for at least one week - what would happen? Black and Brown United in Action recognizes racism as Connecticut’s longest pandemic and urges you to make the necessary change, start removing the chains and striving for true equity and inclusion by declaring racism a public health crisis and supporting HB. 6662.

Sincerely,

Black and Brown United in Action