



**Testimony of Ruby Blackmon
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing**

March 26, 2021

SB 134 – An Act Requiring the Comptroller to Fund the Unfunded Pension Liability Portion of Fringe Benefit Costs for the University of Connecticut Health Center

HB 6662 - An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission of Racial Equity in Public Health

Good evening Chairwoman Osten, Chairwoman Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ruby Blackmon. I live in New Britain and recently retired from my position as a processing technician at Central Connecticut State University.

I am also the President of AFSCME, Council 4 Local 196 which represents 450 state administrative-clerical workers in this region, including more than 275 staff at UConn Health. In addition, I am a member of the Civil Rights Committee for AFSCME Council 4.

I would like to first speak in favor of **SB 134** which would require the Comptroller to fund the unfunded portion of fringe benefits at UConn Health Center. Removing this cost will bring them in line with other state employees rather than sectioning them off by themselves. This would allow for greater flexibility in their budget to hire more staff and expand services to the community.

For the last several years, the members of Local 196 have been concerned about the possibility of the health center being privatized. UConn Health is the state's only public hospital and provides many benefits to our citizens, including many who cannot afford treatment at private hospitals. That is why we strongly object to the statement of purpose that this would facilitate privatization. The people of Connecticut do not deserve to have their only public hospital taken and turned over to a for-profit company. That is why we are urging the committee to include a moratorium of at least 2 years on any privatization of any facility. The hospital should be able to determine the impact of this bill and of Covid-19 before pursuing any privatization.

I also want to speak in favor of **HB 6662** which would declare racism a public health crisis in Connecticut and create a commission on racial equality in public health. Covid-19 has amplified the racial disparities and inequity that exists in Connecticut. Throughout the last year Black and Latino residents are overrepresented as frontline essential workers and had higher cases of Covid-19 in our communities.

Declaring racism an emergency and forming this commission will make Connecticut confront its history of racist laws and policies and take actionable steps to address them. This should include everything from zoning laws that still segregate communities to the policies of the state that lead to wage gaps and disparate discipline.

No one here created racism or the laws and policies that bore racially disparate results but by passing this bill we can fix a structural problem that is impacting people in every community.

We strongly urge the committee to support SB 134 and HB 6662 and pass them out of committee.

Thank you.