

## **Appropriations Committee**

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

H.B. 6662: *An Act Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved and marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF supports H.B. 6662: *An Act Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*.

Systemic and structural racism severely affect multiple aspects of the lives of Connecticut residents, specifically the conditions in which people are born and raised, work and settle down individually or with their families, and eventually age, as well as the other components of their lives in between those stages.

House Bill 6662 will declare racism a public health crisis and create structures to embed anti-racism in policymaking. It will also create a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health that brings together cross-sector partners, a critical step towards ending racism in our state. House Bill 6662 requires the Commission to engage with community members and develop recommendations on the diversity of the healthcare workforce, environment health programs, and cultural humility trainings for students in health programs. House Bill. 6662 also tasks the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health to report to the Connecticut General Assembly on the status of its work, progress towards its goals, and policy recommendations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is just one recent example of how racism is inextricably linked to inequities in healthcare and health disparities. Black and Latino residents have experienced disproportionately high rates of cases and deaths compared to their white counterparts. These cases are the result of long existing income inequality, housing and education discrimination that have led Black and Latino communities in Connecticut to be more likely to work in the essential workforce, live in crowded housing, and experience existing health conditions that make the COVID-19 infection more dangerous.

Racism has already been declared a public health crisis in at least 185 entities across the nation, and in 20 municipalities in Connecticut. CWEALF urges the Committee to pass House Bill 6662 with the following recommendations provided by our partners leading in this initiative:

- The Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health should employ a Health Equity in All Policies approach;
- Allocate funding for two dedicated staff to conduct racial and ethnic impact statements on any proposed bill.

Racism and its lingering effects continue to trickle into the multiple systems that compose our state. In order to ensure that we are providing equal opportunities for all residents in Connecticut, and combat the inherently racist and extremely complex systems and structures in our state, we must pass House Bill 6662 to move Connecticut closer to health equity.