



# NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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TESTIMONY REGARDING HB-6662: AN ACT DECLARING RACISM AS A  
PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON RACIAL  
EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

Appropriations Committee

March 26, 2021

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, Vice Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, and all other distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members statewide, we offer this testimony in **strong support** of *HB-6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*.

The legislative agenda of NASW/CT emphasizes advancing racial, economic, and social justice by promoting anti-racist policies and culturally responsive practices in all aspects of community life, including but not limited to social services, health care, mental health and addition services, education, affordable housing, employment, and equitable access to capital and justice. We support legislation that specifically promotes elimination of inequities and disparities related to race.

Racism is a social determinant of health, causing inequity and disparate outcomes in many areas of life. People of color, especially our Black neighbors, are more likely to experience poor health outcomes as a consequence of these inequities. While not a new situation, COVID-19 has highlighted this health divide with people of color in Connecticut bearing a disproportionate burden of illness and death.

Racism is a public health crisis. Racist practices and policies traumatize and then re-traumatize. **The impact is then used as a vulnerability to exploit.** Social workers understand the significance of delivering trauma-informed care, no matter their field of practice. The trauma of racism can potentially result in multiple lifelong consequences. Instead of asking individuals “*What is wrong with you?*” trauma-informed care directs us

to ask, “*What has happened to you?*” We now consider the importance of adding, “*And what have we – systems [institutions,] and organizations – done to you?*”<sup>1</sup>

The social work profession is held to a code of ethics with our primary mission “to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.”<sup>2</sup> We are fundamentally rooted in the belief that an individual must be seen within the context and complexity of their human experiences, their shared environments, and how those create, influence, and address adversity and barriers. Through application of our core values – service, social justice, **dignity and worth of the person**, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence – our membership is committed to ending racism through education, social justice advocacy, and continued professional development

NASW/CT applauds the language of cultural humility in the bill. A continuing commitment to “(1) self-evaluation and critique of one's own worldview with regard to differences in cultural traditions and belief systems, and (2) awareness of, and active mitigation of, power imbalances between cultures” is the internal work we must consistently do to serve our clients appropriately and effectively, whether individuals, families, communities, or systems.

This legislative session, we have called on our legislators to support making current telehealth provisions permanent; collecting race, ethnicity, and language data; funding student-centered education; expanding Medicaid; providing more community-based approaches to law enforcement; and other justice reforms – all tools that when deployed, will mitigate some of the impact. **But more is required.**

Upholding our code of ethics, NASW-CT also requests you to recognize that we are long past discussing racial discrimination in our communities and acknowledge that condemnation alone or placing the responsibility of action on individual citizens will not address pervasive, systemic racism, bias, and oppression. The work of eliminating health disparities and inequities across **all** sectors can only commence with leadership at the state level, with the establishment of an Executive Department Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health and the resourcing that entails, and we urge the committee to support *HB-6662*.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Trauma Informed Oregon. (2020). Pledge of Solidarity. Retrieved from <https://traumainformedoregon.org/pledge-of-solidarity/>.

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Social Workers. (2017). Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>.