

Testimony in Support of H.B. No. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health

Appropriations Committee
Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH
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March 26, 2021

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

My name is Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin and I am testifying of behalf of The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), where I serve as Executive Director. COHI is a nonprofit oral health advocacy organization with the mission of increasing access to quality, affordable oral health services for all Connecticut residents. **We stand in strong support of H.B. No. 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.**

The Connecticut Department of Public Health's most recent Every Smile Counts⁽¹⁾ report shows that racial and ethnic oral health disparities in our state persist. Black children have higher rates of dental decay than White children and Black children have the lowest rates of preventive treatments, such as sealants. Among third grade students, Black children are 7.34 times more likely than White children to need urgent dental care.

Declaring racism to be a public health crisis offers a clear path to addressing disparities and inequities in our healthcare system. In order to solve a problem, we need to name it. Adopting a resolution can catalyze data and policy analysis to identify and remedy injustices and inequities.

We respectfully recommend the bill include staffing to create racial impact assessments on proposed policies. This will enable the Connecticut General Assembly to evaluate the potential for policies to promote equity or have a disparate impact.

The pandemic did not create the deep racial inequities in our state, but it laid them bare. We can no longer delay progress when we know how our neighbors are hurting. This bill takes necessary steps to dismantle components of systemic racism and move Connecticut closer to health equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **H.B. No. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.**

Sincerely,
Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH
Executive Director
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⁽¹⁾ https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/dph/oral_health/PDF/Every-Smile-Counts-2017-REV-August-2018.pdf?la=en