



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing – March 26, 2021

CHRO Testimony Regarding:

HB 6662 – AA Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

HB 6659 – AAC the Establishment of a Financial Literacy Trust Fund

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on two important bills: HB 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health, and HB 6659, an Act Concerning the Establishment of the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust.

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities strongly supports HB 6662 and the declaration of racism as a public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively touched all of our lives, but for those in the BIPOC community, the effects have been devastating. It has been a stark reminder of how disproportionately the healthcare, education and criminal justice systems work. Not only did last year bring the devastation of COVID-19 but it also continued to bring numerous acts of violence against people based on their race, starting with the death of Brianna Taylor.

Other states and communities have declared racism a public health crisis. It is important that we join and lead those states and communities on this important issue. By establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health stakeholders can engage in meaningful work to achieve the goals outlined in Section 2(k). In its work, the CHRO sees how differential treatment based on race negatively affects one's ability to work, go to school, live in affordable housing and have access to medical care. The experience of the Commission will be a valuable tool to achieve the necessary and important goals of the Commission. As the state entity charged with working to end discrimination in Connecticut through advocacy, enforcement, and education, the CHRO looks forward to working closely with the proponents of this bill.

The CHRO also supports HB 6659, An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust. As the Committee knows, Connecticut has the regrettable distinction of having one of the highest levels of income inequality in the nation. The median Black household earns 58% of what the median White household earns, and the Latinx household earns 55%.¹ This is no accident, but instead the result of our nation's historical divestment of Black and Latinx communities, redlining, exclusion from wealth-building programs like FHA loans and the G.I. Bill, and predatory lending. Black and Latinx residents also face higher rates of unemployment.² Studies have shown that CT towns with the highest proportions of White residents exhibited the largest *increase* in income inequality in the last 15 years.³ The racial wealth gap must be addressed in a multi-pronged approach. Programs such the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust can dramatically shrink the income, wealth, and opportunity gaps for our lowest-income residents, which are disproportionately people of color.

¹ https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/income_inequality_spikes_in_ct

² https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm

³ <https://ctmirror.org/category/ct-viewpoints/income-inequality-in-connecticut-towns-has-a-racial-component-dan-smolnik/>

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities thanks the Committee again for its attention to these important issues and urges it to support HB 662 and HB 6659.