

March 24, 2021

Honorable Members of the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee:

I respectfully urge you to approve and enact into law H.B. No. 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. A retired public-school teacher and administrator, I had worked for thirty-five years in Connecticut's urban (Hartford, Norwich, Norwalk) and suburban (Avon, Woodbury, Tolland, Old Saybrook) school districts. I had seen firsthand the untreated health problems endured by many of our urban students. Many of our Black students suffered from asthma and other respiratory problems exacerbated by living in polluted and densely populated urban environments. They arrived at school routinely complaining of colds, sore throats, and headaches. Obesity was increasingly prevalent, as many of our students had unhealthy diets high in carbohydrates, fats, and sugars and low in protein and fresh fruits and vegetables. Since many of our urban parents were unable to afford doctor or dental services for their children, the school nurses and public health clinics served as their children's primary care providers. Ready access to health clinics was oftentimes difficult, as many urban parents relied on public transportation and had little available time as they juggled two or three jobs each day and provided care for family and extended family members.

In the urban schools where I worked, the number of available mental health staff members (guidance counselors and social workers) was insufficient to adequately address the number of students needing assistance with chronic and oftentimes stress-related mental health issues. As an urban principal, I recall observing that, despite the many hours of counseling and individual support provided to students, their return to dysfunctional and poverty-stricken homes oftentimes rendered our valiant efforts less effective and sustaining.

In conclusion, racism and the poverty it engenders cause such deleterious conditions as poor nutrition, sub-standard housing, crime-infested and polluted neighborhoods, chronic physical and mental health issues, and a lack of access to quality medical and mental health care. Individually and collectively, these conditions impair Black and Latino students' concentration, motivation, and learning. Over time they grind down and destroy their and their family and

community members' physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The unchecked, systemic racism experienced by Connecticut's minority communities is unacceptable. Racism is indeed a health crisis, an indictment of the neglect and tacit acceptance of our political leaders and many of our citizens. I respectfully implore you to declare racism as a public health crisis and to develop and enact transformative legislation to address racism as a public health crisis. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,
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