



Raised H.B. No. 6662 An Act Declaring Racism As A Public Health Crisis And Establishing The Commission On Racial Equity In Public Health.

Senator Catherine A. Osten (Co-Chair), Representative Toni E. Walker (Co-Chair) and Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Rev. Larissa Forsythe. I am an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, a minister at the Congregational Church in South Glastonbury, and I live in Glastonbury, Connecticut. I am here as a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance to stand 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.

My family and I moved to Connecticut from St. Louis, Missouri four years ago to begin my position as Associate Minister at CCSG. I came to this state and to my congregation with a great deal of hope.

I had been ordained for three days when Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager, was murdered by a police officer on the streets of Ferguson Missouri, just 25 miles from my home in Ballwin, MO. Michael Brown's body was left on the street for four and a half hours, in the middle of his neighborhood. His neighbors, his friends, his mother were subjected to the sight of his broken and brutalized body for four and a half hours. As one of the many clergy who volunteered to be a pastoral presence in the neighborhood in the days following Michael Brown's death, I witnessed first hand both the devastation that police violence creates in a community and the resilience and determination of that community to rise above the devastation and claim the joy and wholeness that is their birth right.

At the same time, most of the members of the mostly white congregation I pastored in South County St. Louis had no idea why black folks in Ferguson were so angry in the wake of this young man's death at the hands of police. Those of us who are white - in every corner of this country - often refuse to accept the truth that is right in front of us. We tend to discount the stories of our BIPOC siblings, ignore the abundant evidence before us, and continue to support systemic racism with our actions and inactions.

When I moved here, to this progressive state, I had hope that I was leaving systemic racism and the brutal disparities it creates behind. However, though Connecticut racism is less overt, the disparities in the system - the whole system - are just as if not more brutal. Despite the existence of Connecticut's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System, the racial disparities in our

state's prisons are among the worst in the country. Our state detains Black youth ten times more than white youth. Only five states are worse than Connecticut when it comes to disproportionately imprisoning Black adults, and only seven states are worse than Connecticut when it comes to disproportionately imprisoning Latino adults. This has got to change. I am grateful that my South Glastonbury congregation is committed to working with GHIAA to eradicate the disparities that systemic racism has created. I am grateful for the many folks who have and will testify in support of this bill. I am grateful to you, members of the committee, for your consideration and commitment to making this state a place where all people thrive. I remain hopeful that this bill will pass and that our legislators - that all of you - will not only listen to the Commission's reports on the data surrounding racial inequity but ACT to make changes in the systems that perpetuate those disparities.

My theology teaches me that every person is beloved in the eyes of God and that all of us are interconnected. My well being is dependent on your well being and the well being of every one of my neighbors. None of us can be free and well until all of us are free and well.

H.B. 6662 is an important step in the right direction. We MUST declare eradication of systemic racism a top priority in our state.

H.B. 6662 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. I stand with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis and ask that this bill be amended to include a review and reform of the legislative process to improve public accessibility and set in place mechanisms to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. No. 6662 An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

Sincerely,

Rev. Larissa Forsythe
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