

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

My name is Melinda I. Johnson I am the Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy with the YWCA Hartford Region and I am a resident of Hartford Connecticut. The YWCA Hartford Region continues to serve our community through our mission to eliminate racism and empower women. In the spirit of our mission I 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.

From 2020 to present we have found ourselves faced with a trifold crisis in our country. A global pandemic that is still underway, an economic crisis which is yet to stabilize and the undeniable reality of systemic and structural racism. While all of us have been impacted by our present challenges, black and brown communities who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised have found themselves grasping for resiliency where there ought to be resources and reconciliation. The State of Connecticut must lead at the intersection of racial justice and public health.

According to the RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS: Here's how to respond a report produced by St Louis University, Data for Progress and the Justice Collaborative Institute. Racial health disparities are estimated to cost the United States \$175 billion in lost life years (3.5 million lost years at \$50,000 per life year) and \$135 billion per year in excess healthcare costs and untapped productivity. When we count the cost of racism in lives we realize that we can not approach equity conversations the same way we approach charity conversations. The work our state is embarking upon to address systemic racism requires us to be critical to ensure we put forth more than good efforts but that we create sustainable change.

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.