



**Testimony of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center
In Support of HB 6662, With Amendments**

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB 6662.

My name is David Lavery. I am a staff attorney at the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. Our mission is to ensure that all people in Connecticut have access to the housing of their choice.

Systemic and structural racism play a large role in determining the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and affects people's access to quality housing, education, food, transportation, political power, and other social determinants of health. Understanding and addressing racism from a public health perspective is crucial to eliminating racial and ethnic inequities and improving opportunity and well-being across communities. Equal access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing is a cornerstone of ending racial health disparities.

People of color face systemic barriers to safe and affordable housing, affecting their financial stability, access to employment, and quality schooling, all of which cause negative health outcomes. Restrictive zoning rules reduce housing choice. State transportation policy fails to connect communities of color to opportunities for education and employment. Property tax valuation overcharges communities of color. Public repositories of data – criminal and eviction records – are sold by the state or otherwise made available to commercial users who deny housing and employment opportunities, disproportionately impacting people of color

The physical characteristics of housing directly impacts health: people living in poor quality housing suffer from poor water quality, poor air quality, and exposure to environmental pollutants such as lead and asbestos.

Seemingly minor policy can have far-reaching structural effects. Falls from windows are a well-documented cause of childhood fatalities, especially in eastern U.S. cities, especially affecting Black and Latinx children.¹ In 1976, New York City adopted a requirement that landlords provide window guards to tenants if they had children under 10. Connecticut doesn't even require window locks.

It is similarly well-established that lead poisoning is more likely to impact children of color than white children.² Yet Connecticut uses dated lead guidelines that lag federal standards, allowing municipalities to avoid protecting children of color from lead poisoning.³

While we support the legislation as drafted, we believe it should be amended to include tools to empower commissioners to reach the targets contained within the bill. For example, the Commissioners should have access to a procedure to amend state regulations that are perpetuating racial health disparities. Similarly, Commissioners should be involved in discretionary policy actions that may impact racial health disparities.

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.

¹ Spiegel, Charlotte N., and Francis C. Lindaman. "Children can't fly: a program to prevent childhood morbidity and mortality from window falls." *American Journal of Public Health* 67.12 (1977): 1143-1147; Vish, Nora L., et al. "Pediatric window falls: not just a problem for children in high rises." *Injury Prevention* 11.5 (2005): 300-303; Stone, Kimberly E., et al. "Childhood injuries and deaths due to falls from windows." *Journal of urban health* 77.1 (2000): 26-33.

² Sampson, Robert J., and Alix S. Winter. "The racial ecology of lead poisoning: Toxic inequality in Chicago neighborhoods, 1995-2013." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13.2 (2016): 261-283; Krieger, Nancy, et al. "Choosing area based socioeconomic measures to monitor social inequalities in low birth weight and childhood lead poisoning: The Public Health Disparities Geocoding Project (US)." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 57.3 (2003): 186-199.

³ O'Leary, Mary. "New Haven lead policies cause 'disparate impact' on black and Hispanic children, lawsuit says." *New Haven Register*, Nov. 19, 2019, available at <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/New-Haven-lead-policies-causing-irreparable-14843976.php>.