

March 25, 2021

Written testimony submitted to members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly in support of House Bill No. 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

To Senator Catherine A. Osten, Representative Toni E. Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Rev. Isaac Lawson and I live in Hartford, CT. I support H.B. No. 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

The congregation that I pastor is in Hartford's Asylum Hill neighborhood. My congregation is heavily involved in charity work with the community. We host the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen on our property, we provided shelter space for homeless families last year during Hartford's shelter shortage, and we regularly provide bus passes and other rental/utility assistance to those in need. As a church, we feel that it is our Christian duty to respond to the needs of the marginalized in our society. However, charity IS NOT and CANNOT be the solution to the problems that we face. We MUST pass legislation like H.B. No 6662 to begin to tackle the root cause of vicious cycles of marginalization.

As an African American male helping to pastor a predominantly white congregation, I am particularly aware that those who come to our door daily in need are almost exclusively people of color – people who look like me. The families that stayed in our shelter space were families of color. The youngest child was a baby no more than two weeks old. Hartford needs a plan ASAP!

H.B. No 6662 is the start of that plan that will establish a commission to research and respond to how racism and racial bias systemically and systematically affect the health outcomes (include mortality) of people of color negatively.

Again, I support and 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. The health of our state literally depends on it.

Sincerely,

Rev. Isaac Lawson

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