

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 Dr. Susan Levine and I live in West Hartford, Connecticut. 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.

I am a general internist at the University of Connecticut health center. In over 25 years of practice, I have seen first hand the repeated and direct effects of systemic racism on our health care system. I see every day the disproportionate health inequities faced by individuals forced to navigate a system that does not offer an equal footing. Just this morning I encountered 4 patients directly impacted by systemic racism. The first patient had poorly controlled diabetes, the second very high blood pressure, the third had a curious rash and the fourth couldn't make it to his appointment. All four of these patients are patients of color with health outcomes directly impacted by systemic racism. The first patient lost his job due to COVID and wasn't able to afford his medications, the second patient is recently homeless and had his medications stolen. The third patient had a rash that I thought I could identify; but when I consulted my standard dermatologic textbook I could not find any confirmatory pictures in her skin color. The fourth patient lives in an area where medical transportation would not pick him up.

We teach our medical students about social determinants of health; but in reality that framework is still too narrow. The 4 patients of my typical morning illustrate the pervasiveness of our structural racism. To truly impact the driving forces behind these health care disparities requires that we see employment, housing, food security and education and their fundamental impacts on health care.

I see declaring racism as a public health crisis as a first step toward recognizing the interconnectedness of these forces.

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

Thank you for your consideration.

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