

Rev. Josh Pawelek
Glastonbury, CT
Testimony in Support of
HB 6662 AN ACT DECLARING RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE
COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester, and a clergy leader with the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, which is a partner in the Connecticut Campaign to Declare Racism as a Public Health Crisis, along with Health Equity Solutions, the YWCA, Power Up CT and many others. I live in Glastonbury. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 6662 and the need to declare racism as a public health crisis.

I am convinced this declaration is necessary. The data on how the coronavirus has impacted black, indigenous, and people of color communities more severely than white communities across the country and in Connecticut should be enough for every reasonable person to recognize that racism is a public health crisis. Data on racial disparities in maternal deaths, infant mortality, diabetes, heart disease, and many other common diseases should be enough for any reasonable person to recognize racism is a public health crisis. Data on racial disparities in the social determinants of health, including access to healthy, fresh food, access to decent education, access to affordable housing, access to secure employment, and access to quality, affordable, culturally-sensitive health care, should be enough for any reasonable person to recognize that racism is a public health crisis for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

People of faith, regardless of religious affiliation, recognize a common moral obligation to care for the most vulnerable in society. In traditional Biblical language we might refer to the widow, the orphan, the leper, the prisoner, the alien residing among us. Today, mindful of the data on racialized health disparities, it is clear that Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color are living with considerable vulnerabilities. We are called to respond.

HB 6662 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with concerted, data-driven, in-depth action, and for that reason I urge you to support it. I also join with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis to 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.

Let's make this declaration. Let's commit to addressing this crisis with the same resolve, conviction and dedication of resources we would give to any other crisis. Please support H.B. 6662.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Josh Pawelek