



Appropriations Committee, March 26, 2021

Testimony Submitted by Robin Lamott Sparks, Executive Director
End Hunger Connecticut!

H.B. No. 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establish the Commission on Racism Equity in Public Health.

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Robin Lamott Sparks, and I serve as the Executive Director at End Hunger Connecticut!, a state-wide anti-hunger nonprofit that assists residents with critical federal food assistance resources, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We stand in complete 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.

EHC! joins other public-health and community organizations, along with 20 other municipalities in Connecticut to affirm that racism meets the three main requirements of a public health crisis. First, it effects a large number of people. Secondly, it threatens health over the long-term. And thirdly, it requires the adoption of large-scale solutions. A 2019 Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy report confirmed that our residents of color experience higher rates of food insecurity over the course of their lifetime compared to White and Asian residents. Because food insecurity increases levels of stress, poor nutrition, rates of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, EHC! believes the state needs to declare racism a public health crisis to more adequately address these systemic health inequalities that result from food insecurity.

Additionally, EHC! agrees that we need to establish a Commission on Racial Inequality and Health because we believe it is not enough to simply state that there is a public health crisis. We must have an official system in place to ensure Connecticut works towards health and racial equity. Consequently, we respectfully recommend the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health include staffing to create racial impact assessments on proposed policies. This practice will enable the Connecticut General Assembly to evaluate the potential for policies to promote equity or have a disparate impact.

The pandemic did not create the deep racial inequities in our state, but it offers us an opportunity to address them. The unequal health and economic impact of COVID-19 on communities of color over this past year affirmed that our leaders must act to end the perpetuation of generational trauma and inequity. Connecticut leaders have the power to improve the wellbeing and health of our residents by enacting this legislation, and we urge you to use this authority to correct health injustices experienced by our residents of color. We believe this bill takes steps towards moving Connecticut closer to health equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony 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.**