



Appropriations Committee, March 26, 2021

Testimony submitted by Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Attorney

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

HB 6662: Support

My name is Alison Weir, and I am a Policy Advocate and Attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid. I am writing in support of HB 6662, An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.

This bill would address a problem that has been long festering, but has come to special prominence as a result of the pandemic. COVID-19 has had a devastating and disparate impact on our communities of color, and still today, vaccines have not been distributed proportionally to these communities, let alone to those most impacted by the disease. This bill would approach racial disparities in public health from a multidisciplinary approach and would bring to bear the expertise of multiple state agencies to address issues that affect the health of our BIPOC residents. These issues are not limited to the laws and regulations regarding public health particularly, but also bear on those aspects of life that affect the health of communities—access to safe and affordable housing, food insecurity and access to healthy food, clean air and water, access to recreational areas, and access to quality education, among other things. It also provides criteria to determine the success of the commission, with a measurable target to reduce disparity by 70% in a number of areas. It would also require the Department of Public Health to study and implement a plan to increase recruitment and retention of public health workers of color; the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to assess racial equity within its environmental health quality programs; and the Office of Higher education to develop a plan for recruiting more people of color for health career training.

Legal Services appreciates the multidimensional approach to address the deeply rooted disparities in public health for the BIPOC residents of Connecticut, the impact of which we see daily among our clients. There is much work to do, and we believe publicly declaring racism a public health crisis and establishing an interagency commission to address the issue with a stated and measurable goal is a step in the right direction.