



**Testimony of
Mary Yordon
AFTCT Divisional Vice President and President Norwalk Federation of Teachers**

**Appropriations Committee
March 26, 2021**

***In support of*
House Bill 6662: An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the
Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Member Miner, Ranking Member France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Mary Yordon and I am a teacher certified in Social Studies and French, and the president of the Norwalk Federation of Teachers. I am also a Divisional Vice President of AFT Connecticut. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state.

I am writing to express our support for House Bill 6662, *An Act Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health*.

Racial discrimination affects access to the elements contributing to good health identified in the legislation including legal and criminal justice, fresh food, physical activity, public safety, clean air, safe and affordable housing, good jobs, health care and educational attainments.

The educational community struggles to provide enough supports to all our students to overcome the many challenges they are facing. Among those challenges is racism, within our own educational structures and in society at large. There are disproportionate outcomes in Kindergarten readiness, third grade reading, scores on the mastery examination, the 4-year graduation rate, incidences of suspensions/expulsions, chronic absenteeism, college enrollment, college completion, as well as the racial and ethnic composition of the teaching force. Some of these are detailed in the State Department of Education's recent report: ["The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2019-2020."](#)

Education is thought of as an equalizer, but all too often we are only providing the illusion of equitable education. For example, when students come to school hungry or feel anxious from harsh realities beyond or within the school walls, or without appropriate medical care for a problem, they may have reduced ability to engage with the educational activities provided,

though they are side by side with others who can engage and do. Teachers see this first-hand on a daily basis.

HB 6662 provides for the possibility of a wide range of study to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to eliminate health disparities and inequities across sectors. I support this bill which puts us on a path towards a more just and more healthy society. When our students and their families live in a more just society, they will flourish physically, emotionally, and educationally. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.