

Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

Co-Chairs: Claudio Gualtieri, OPM Designee & Tekisha Dwan Everette, PhD, Executive Director Health Equity Solutions

Second Report to the CGA's Appropriations and Public Health Committees July 2022

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Introduction to the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

The Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health (CREPH) was created under Section 2 of Public Act 21-35/Senate Bill 1 – An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to The Pandemic. The overarching goals of PA 21-35 are to equalize comprehensive access to mental, behavioral, and physical health care in response to the pandemic. Under this legislation, the Commission has the duty to:

- Support collaboration by bringing together partners from many different sectors to recognize the links between health and other issues and policy areas and build new partnerships to promote health and equity and increase government efficiency.
- Create a comprehensive strategic plan to eliminate health disparities and inequities across sectors.
- Study the impact that the public health crisis of racism has on vulnerable populations within diverse groups of the state population, including on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability, including, but not limited to, Black American descendants of slavery.¹

The focus areas for commission recommendations per PA 21-35/SB 1 include:

1. Structural racism in the state's laws and regulations impacting public health, where, as used in this subdivision, "structural racism" means a system that structures opportunity and assigns value in a way that disproportionately and negatively impacts Black, Indigenous, Latino or Asian people or other people of color.
2. Racial disparities in the state's criminal justice system and its impact on the health and well-being of individuals and families, including overall health outcomes and rates of depression, suicide, substance use disorder and chronic disease.
3. Racial disparities in access to the resources necessary for healthy living, including, but not limited to, access to adequate fresh food and physical activity, public safety, and the decrease of pollution in communities.
4. Racial disparities in health outcomes.
5. The impact of zoning restrictions on the creation of housing disparities and such disparities' impact on public health.
6. Racial disparities in state hiring and contracting processes.
7. Any suggestions to reduce the impact of the public health crisis of racism within the vulnerable populations.²

The Commission currently has 25 members (including co-chairs):

1. Claudio Gualtieri, OPM Designee - Co-Chair

¹ This language was taken directly from PA 21-35.

² This language was taken directly from PA 21-35.

2. Tekisha Dwan Everette, PhD, Executive Director Health Equity Solutions - Co-Chair
3. Astread Ferron-Poole, Chief of Staff – Department of Social Services (DSS)
4. Carline Charmelus, Collective Impact & Equity Manager, Partnership for Strong Communities
5. Chavon Hamilton, Founder/Executive Director, Hartford Health Initiative
6. Diana Reyes, Quality Improvement Data Specialist – Office of Early Childhood (OEC)
7. Craig Burns, Chief Mental Health Officer – Department of Correction (DOC)
8. Heather Aaron, Deputy Commissioner – Department of Public Health (DPH)
9. Hilda Santiago, State Representative & Black and Puerto Rican Caucus (BPRC) Member
10. John Frassinelli, Division Director for the Bureau of Health, Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education – State Department of Education (SDE)
11. Jonathan Steinberg, House Chairperson of the Public Health Committee
12. Katie Dykes, Commissioner – Department of Environmental and Energy Protection (DEEP)
13. Kean Zimmerman, Attorney and Member of the CT Bar Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee
14. Kenyatta Muzzanni, Director of Organizing – Katal Center
15. Kyle Abercrombie, Director of Government Affairs – Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)
16. Leonard Jahad, Connecticut Violence Intervention Program
17. Marina Marmolejo, Program Manager, UniteCT – Department of Housing (DOH)
18. Mary Daughtery Abrams, Senate Chairperson of the Public Health Committee
19. Melissa Santos, Division Head, Pediatric Psychology; Connecticut Children's
20. Steven Hernández, Executive Director – Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO)
21. Tammy Hendricks, Access Health CT Director of Health Equity
22. Tiffany Donelson, President & CEO – CT Health Foundation
23. Travis Simms, State Representative & Black and Puerto Rican Caucus (BPRC) Member
24. Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner – Department of Children and Families (DCF)
25. Victoria Veltri, Executive Director – Office of Health Strategy (OHS)
 - Marc Pelka, Under Secretary - OPM, Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division, is not a member of the Commission, but chairs the Criminal Justice Subcommittee

Since the last report, the following membership changes have been made:

- Claudio Gualtieri, OPM Undersecretary for Health and Human Services, was designated by OPM Secretary Jeffrey Beckham as the OPM designee.
- Senator Duff appointed Dr. Melissa Santos to fill the position vacated by Ryan Calhoun.
- Commissioner Katie Dykes will now represent DEEP given Natalie Braswell's appointment as Comptroller.

There are still three vacancies:

1. a medical professional with expertise in mental health to be appointed by the Senate Minority Leader

2. a representative of the Open Communities Alliance to be appointed by the Senate Minority Leader
3. a physician educator associated with The University of Connecticut who has experience and expertise in infant and maternal care and who has worked on diversity and inclusion policy to be appointed by the House Minority Leader

Executive Director Update

The Office of Legislative Management (OLM) restarted the process to hire an executive director in February 2022 after the position remained unfilled following the first recruitment and hiring attempt during Fall 2021. During February, the position was advertised through the following agencies: The CT Directors of Health organization, Indeed, LinkedIn, Government Jobs, National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP), and National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). OLM received a large number of resumes, but many did not meet the state qualifications.

Six candidates were chosen for a first-round interview with a panel that consisted of Steven Hernández (Executive Director for the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors), Caroline Beitman (Human Resources Administrator for OLM), and Andrea Walker (Principal HR Analyst for OLM). This panel sent 4 candidates for consideration to Jim Tamburro (OLM Director), Jason Welch (Senate Republican representative), and Representative Bobby Gibson (House Democratic representative). They narrowed the pool to 3 candidates who were then interviewed by Gualtieri and Dashni Sathasivam (Health Equity Solutions representative for Everett). This team unanimously felt the selected candidate was the best fit despite the fact all three were strong choices. The candidate's references were checked, and her resume and cover letter were sent to the Commission for their review and a confirmation vote.

During the May 9th Special Meeting of the Commission, Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH, was confirmed as the inaugural Executive Director for the CREPH. More complete notes on the confirmation vote are included in the Commission Meetings section of this report. Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin's first day as Executive Director of the Commission was Tuesday, June 14th.

In her first two weeks in this role, the Executive Director has contacted all commission members, met with six members, and scheduled meetings with others throughout the summer. She intends to meet with all commission members, and other current and potential stakeholders throughout her first few months. Strategic planning and staffing the Commission will be her immediate tasks.

Strategic Plan Update

Strategic planning is one of the first main tasks of the Commission and a main focus of the newly hired Executive Director, Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin.

The ED proposes including both long-term visioning and short-term goals in the strategic plan. The Commission should identify and prioritize high-impact, feasible goals to decrease the impact of racism on public health. Focus areas for the Commission's work are outlined in PA 21-35 and listed on page 2 of this report. The plan should include goals for incorporating health equity into policies, programs, and government decision-making processes across the statutory focus areas. The plan will be developed with the Commission membership and include recommendations from the subcommittees, whose charges

align with the focus areas. Early in the strategic planning process, the ED will engage Commission members on their view of priorities, challenges, and opportunities to advance racial equity in public health.

The plan shall include an outline for engaging community in the Commission's work, including developing and executing priorities. The Commission needs to engage community early on and deliberately build and deepen connections to community over time. The plan will include a commitment to establishing trusted relationships with communities that are disproportionately harmed by racial inequities and community engagement practices the Commission may employ.

The plan shall include metrics, which can be revised and supplemented over time as seen fit by the Commission, for tracking progress towards the subcommittees' charges and the overarching goal of racial equity in public health. Metrics will include indicators in the following areas: education, health care utilization and outcomes, criminal justice, and economics.³ The Commission will consider strategic partnerships with academic and research institutions in furtherance of the goal to establish baseline data and track progress toward narrowing race-based disparities.

Commission Meetings

Since the start of the 2022 calendar year, the Commission held three regular meetings and one special meeting. Summaries of each meeting are below, and full meeting packets are included in the Appendix of this report. Subcommittees also continued to meet throughout the last six months and reported on their progress during the March and May Commission meetings. Those reports are also included in each meeting packet.

January 26th, 2022 – Regular Meeting

The Commission held their second plenary meeting on January 26th. Beitman gave an update on the search for an executive director and reported that the finalist declined the offer to pursue another opportunity. OLM reported on plans to restart the recruitment process.

Dr. Everette presented on words and vocabulary on equity in an effort for members to gain an understanding of key terms to facilitate the commission's dialogue in meetings, subcommittee meetings, community outreach, and commission publications. The full presentation is attached to this report.

March 28th, 2022 – Regular Meeting

The Commission met for a third time on March 28th. Beitman provided another update on the executive director hiring and recruitment process, and announced that they would narrow the pool to a handful of finalists for interviews with the co-chairs.

The Commission heard presentations from three guest speakers. Mark Abraham presented on DataHaven's approaches to community data needs, results from their 2021 Family Economic Security Survey, efforts to create Town Equity Reports and Regional Equity Profiles. Sumit Sajnani gave an update on OHS's efforts on the CT Race, Ethnicity and Language (REL) initiative per Section 11 of the PA 21-35.

³ These indicator categories were taken directly from Sec. 3 of PA 21-35.

Dr. Karen Wang gave a history of past, present, and future work on race and ethnicity data collection and analytics for health equity and provided an overview of the 7 stages of the Roadmap for Race, Ethnicity, and Language Data Collection and Use in Connecticut.

May 9th, 2022 – Special Meeting

The Commission held a special meeting on May 9th to consider the hiring of Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH as Executive Director. The Commission went into Executive Session to first hear a statement from the candidate and then deliberate on the decision. Following executive session, the Commission voted by roll call to approve Goodwin as the first Executive Director in a 16-0-9 vote.

May 23rd, 2022 – Regular Meeting

The fourth regular meeting of the Commission was held on May 23rd. The members were addressed by incoming Executive Director Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH. She would officially begin in this role in June. Her immediate tasks would be to review the various reports and meeting materials that the Commission had produced since its first meeting. In her first few months, she indicated that she would be meeting with members individually to learn more about their perspectives and vision for the Commission. She also indicated that starting to work on the strategic plan, with both short-term and long-term goals, was the most immediate task.

The Commission also heard two presentations. The first was from Sandra Gill, Planning Consultant, for the Department of Public Health. She provided an update on Healthy CT 2025: State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP). The second presentation was led by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and included Dawn Lambert, Co-leader, Community Options Unit, and Karri Filek from DSS and Kris Noam, Ph.D., MSc Health Research Scientist, Beacon Health Options. Together they presented on Connecticut Housing Engagement and Supports Services (CHESS). This was followed by a presentation on Analytics + Equity and data democratization by Susan Smith, DSS's Director, Business Intelligence + Analytics. Both PowerPoint presentations are included with this report.

Subcommittee Reports

Criminal Justice Subcommittee

- **Aligns with Recommendation #2**
- **Chair:** Marc Pelka
- **Members:** Leonard Jahad, Kean Zimmerman, Monica Rams (Representative for Vanessa Dorantes), Diana Reyes, Craig Burns, Kenya Muzzani

The Criminal Justice Subcommittee has met five times since being established. The subcommittee understands its goals to include providing analysis and recommendations to the CREPH, particularly the executive director and staff, regarding racial disparities in juvenile and criminal justice systems in Connecticut, their impacts on health and well-being of individuals and families, and strategies to reduce these disparities.

After receiving greater clarity on the subcommittee's charge, members sought a lay of the land to become familiar with ongoing research and projects related to reducing racial disparities in the criminal justice system. To that end, the subcommittee received a presentation from Andrew Clark, executive director of the University of Connecticut Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP), and staff. IMRP covered the array of relevant projects relating to racial disparities in the criminal justice system that it covers, including but not limited to the CT Racial Profiling Prohibition Project, the racial disparities in sentencing under the Sentencing Commission, support provided to the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities, and various criminal justice research projects. IMRP's presentation helped the subcommittee appreciate the need, for the sake of efficiency and maximizing the impact of the CREPH's work, to draw on available expertise, research, and projects in the state to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Dr. Burns, also a member of the subcommittee, briefed fellow members on initial discussions within the DOC to further develop and examine metrics to capture health and social factors by demographics among the population incarcerated in state correctional facilities. Collecting and analyzing these data could help inform the CREPH's work on the health impacts of racial disparities. The following were among the topics the subcommittee discussed: how to capture a wide breadth of health and social factors, what to measure quantitatively versus qualitatively, whether to focus on subpopulations (such as high-need individuals heavily utilizing correctional health care service), whether to prioritize data that already have been entered as electronic case management system compared to data that will need to be collected, and what non-health and -social data to request.

Future subcommittee meetings are expected to include presentations from additional subject matter experts, agencies and organizations, and others who can help inform members of ongoing strategies and efforts to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. The intent is for these presentations to generate contact information, reports, and overviews of prior and ongoing studies that will be provided to the CREPH. Examples of presenters expected to attend subcommittee meetings include but are not limited to:

- The Office of Policy and Management Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division regarding the ongoing development of the Equity Dashboard, which will present analysis of disparities in the juvenile justice system.
- Dr. Danielle Cooper from the University of New Haven and Erika Nowakowski from the Tow Youth Justice Institute regarding the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee's strategic plan and racial-and-ethnicity-disparities-reduction goal; an ongoing health, housing, and education study underway, and subcommittee structure with focus on racial disparities.
- Dr. Lisa Puglisi, the Director of Yale Transitions Clinic regarding their work providing primary care to justice-involved individuals released from incarceration. This includes providing support to individuals with managing chronic health conditions and substance use disorder through peer community health workers.
- Melinda L. Johnson, the Director, Community Engagement and Advocacy at the YWCA Hartford Region regarding their organization, programming, and advocacy. The YWCA is able to provide a community-based perspective to inform the work and recommendations of the subcommittee.

Continued discussions, collection of information, and receipt of presentations will help the subcommittee develop resource and recommendations to be submitted to the CREPH. The subcommittee hopes that its efforts will help the commission achieve its objectives related to addressing racial disparities in the criminal and juvenile justice system.

Public Health, Health Outcomes and Healthy Living Subcommittee

- **Aligns with Recommendations #3, 4, & 7**
- **Co-Chairs:** Chavon Hamilton & Tiffany Donelson
- **Members:** Heather Aaron, Mary Daugherty Abrams, John Frassinelli, Tammy Hendricks, Melissa Santos, Jonathan Steinberg

The Public Health Subcommittee continues to conduct a landscape analysis of the various indicators related to public health to then use as benchmarks to measure progress. The subcommittee has selected an initial set of measures, and committee members are reviewing the recommendations and providing feedback. Current priorities include:

Identifying indicators to create benchmarks to measure progress.

- Health Equity Solutions staff identified and collected reports and data that are available online on topics such as disparities in access to health insurance, education, maternal and child health, behavioral health, social determinants of health, and chronic disease rates. Health Equity Solutions organized these indicators into the categories of education, physical health, and environmental health. The subcommittee narrowed down the indicators within those categories based on what we will explore further and that we wish to develop benchmarks for.
- Committee members have been asked to review the recommended indicators to finalize the set.
- With the support of Health Equity Solutions, the committee will explore the data sets available to establish the baseline and for ongoing monitoring of the health indicators.

Identifying agencies and organizations to present their organization's data at future meetings.

- The committee has received presentations from the department of health regarding maternal health and oral health indicators.
- For future meetings, we will consider inviting guest additional speakers from various state agencies to elaborate on the indicators that are chosen so that we may gain a deeper understanding of what may be possible when deciding on how to create benchmarks for them.

The subcommittee's goals for the summer and fall include finalizing the health indicators and confirming the data sets available to support developing a baseline and for ongoing monitoring of the indicators.

Structural Racism in Laws, Regulation, State Business & Hiring Subcommittee

- **Aligns with Recommendations #1 & 6**
- **Chair:** Steven Hernández
- **Members:** Heather Aaron, Astread Ferron-Poole, Hilda Santiago, Victoria Veltri

Subcommittee met to take an assessment of current state hiring and contracting practices. Subcommittee members brainstormed key stakeholders and state agencies to engage in this work. CHRO presented to share information about state agency affirmative action plans and related state

policies for hiring and contract requirements. Subcommittee members have identified a DAS equity study in process that will be critical to this dimension of the Commission's work.

Zoning Subcommittee

- **Aligns with Recommendation #5**
- **Chair:** Kyle Abercrombie
- **Members:** Carline Charmelus, Marina Marmolejo, Travis Simms, Bruce Wittchen

The Zoning Subcommittee has been meeting on a biweekly cadence since formed in January. To date, the subcommittee has spent time familiarizing themselves with the enabling legislation and working toward defining their charge. The subcommittee felt it was important to hear from stakeholders in the zoning space, and they have had DesegregateCT attend a subcommittee meeting to hear about their work, and plan to meet with additional organizations and entities whose focus is on zoning in Connecticut. The Partnership for Strong Communities is working with Trinity College's Master of Arts in Public Policy program and participants in the Public Policy Practicum class. These students produced a report (which is included in this reports' Appendix) and presented their findings to the subcommittee:

- Examining the impact of zoning restrictions on the creation of housing disparities and how such disparities impact public health.
- Conducting a literature review of existing research on the impacts of zoning on public health disparities & data from the state health department.
- Comparing demographically similar municipalities in Connecticut that have been zoned differently and have thus resulted in differing public health outcomes.

The Subcommittee plans to hear from the public and key stakeholders, with the goals of studying the impact of zoning on racial equity and public health, supporting collaboration in the space, and contributing to a comprehensive strategic plan.

Attachments

The following materials are attached to this report:

- January 26th, 2022 – Regular Meeting Minutes and Presentation Packet
- March 28th, 2022 – Regular Meeting Minutes and Presentation Packet
- May 9th, 2022 – Special Meeting Minutes
- May 23rd, 2022 – Regular Meeting Minutes and Presentation Packet
- Zoning Regulations, Public Health, and NIMBYism in Connecticut: A Review of the Literature and Two Connecticut Case Studies