

Racial Equity in Public Health Commission

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

First Report to the CGA's Appropriations and Public Health Committees

March 11, 2022

Introduction to the Racial Equity in Public Health Commission

The Racial Equity in Public Health Commission 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.

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

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 has twenty-eight members including co-chairs. Per PA 21-35 designates the Secretary of Office of Policy and Management (OPM) or a designee and Dr. Tekisha Everette, Executive Director Healthy Equity Solutions as the co-chairs. Acting Secretary Jeffrey Beckham designated Undersecretary Claudio Gualtieri on March 2, 2022, to assume the role of co-chair for OPM. The following individuals have been appointed as members:

MEMBER	QUALIFICATIONS/APPOINTING AUTHORITY
Leonard Jahad , Connecticut Violence Intervention Program	a representative of a violence intervention program using a health-based approach to examine individuals post-incarceration and policies for integration appointed by the Senate President
Tiffany Donelson , President & CEO - CT Health Foundation	a representative of the Connecticut Health Foundation appointed by the Senate President
Chavon Hamilton , Founder/Executive Director. Hartford Health Initiative	a representative of a nonprofit organization that focuses on racial equity issues appointed by the Speaker of the House
Melissa Santos , Division Chief of Pediatric Psychology – Connecticut Children's	a representative of the Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health appointed by the Senate Majority Leader
Kenyatta Muzzani , Director of Organizing – Katal Center	a representative of the Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice appointed by the House Majority Leader
Carline Charmelus , Collective Impact & Equity Manager, Partnership for Strong Communities	a representative of the Partnership for Strong Communities appointed by the House Minority Leader
Mary Daughtery Abrams , Senate Chairperson of the Public Health Committee	Senate Chairperson of the Public Health Committee per PA 21-35
Jonathan Steinberg , House Chairperson of the Public Health Committee	House Chairperson of the Public Health Committee per PA 21-35
Hilda Santiago , State Representative & BPRC Member	a member of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, appointed by the caucus chairperson
Travis Simms , State Representative & BPRC Member	a member of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, appointed by the caucus chairperson
Kean Zimmerman , Tokio Marine HCC - D&O Group, Farmington	a representative of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Connecticut Bar Association appointed by the Governor
Heather Aaron , Deputy Commissioner – DPH	Commissioner of Public Health, or designee, per PA 21-35

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

Vannessa Dorantes , Commissioner -DCF	Commissioner of Children and Families, or designee, per PA 21-35
Diana Reyes , Quality Improvement Data Specialist – OEC	Commissioner of Early Childhood, or designee, per PA 21-35
Astread Ferron-Poole , Chief of Staff – DSS	Commissioner of Social Services, or designee, per PA 21-35
Kyle Abercrombie , Director of Government Affairs – DECD	Commissioner of Economic and Community Development, or designee, per PA 21-35
John Frassinelli , Division Director for the Bureau of Health, Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education – SDE	Commissioner of Education, or designee, per PA 21-35
Marina Marmolejo , Program Manager, UniteCT – DOH	Commissioner of Housing, or designee, per PA 21-35
Tammy Hendricks , Access Health CT Director of Health Equity	Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Health Insurance Exchange, or designee, per PA 21-35
Steven Hernández , Executive Director – CWCSEO	Executive Director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, or designee, per PA 21-35
Victoria Veltri , Executive Director - OHS	Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy, or designee, per PA 21-35
Craig Burns , Chief Mental Health Officer – DOC	Commissioner of Correction, or designee, per PA 21-35

There are four vacancies on the commission. Natalie Braswell was appointed as the DEEP Commissioner's designee when she was serving the agency as the Chief of Planning, Legal & Regulatory Affairs. With her recent appointment as State Comptroller, DEEP must name a permanent designee.

The three other vacancies are as follows: 1. a medical professional with expertise in mental health and 2. a representative of the Open Communities Alliance both to be appointed by the Senate Minority Leader and 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.

This is the first report that is due to the Appropriations and Public Health Committees. This report will highlight the activities of the commission from establishment through March 2022. Subsequent reports will be made semiannually and will include:

- Any recommended changes to such goal based on the research conducted by the commission, any disparity study performed by any state agency or entity, or any community input received.
- The status of the comprehensive strategic plan.
- Any recommendations for policy changes or amendments to state law.

Resources for the Commission

The FY22-FY23 Budget allocated funding to the Office of Legislative Management (OLM) for the Commission. Funding (as outlined below) can be used to hire staff, purchase equipment, and for other expenses. PA 21-35 permits the Commission to hire an Executive Director and then the Executive Director may hire up to two executive assistants. The Commission is currently staffed and supported by OPM and Healthy Equity Solutions. A transition will take place once an Executive Director has been hired. An update on the search and hire for this role is included later in this report.

Establish the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health

Personal Services	-	-	250,000	280,000	250,000	280,000
Other Expenses	-	-	285,000	285,000	285,000	285,000
Equipment	-	-	20,000	-	20,000	-
Total - General Fund	-	-	555,000	565,000	555,000	565,000
Positions - General Fund	-	-	3	3	3	3

Legislative

Section 2 of PA 21-35 establishes a Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health in the legislative branch, to document and make recommendations to decrease the effect of racism on public health.

The commission, by majority vote and with the assistance of Legislative Management (OLM) shall hire an Executive Director. The Executive Director may hire not more than two executive assistants to assist in carrying out the duties of the commission.

Meetings

The first meeting of the Commission was held on November 17, 2021 via Teams. The event was also broadcast on CT-N. The Co-Chairs presented a PowerPoint that is included with this report. The presentation included an overview of equity focused legislation that was passed during the 2021 Session and the goals and duties of the Commission. The meeting also included an update from the OLM on the hiring of an Executive Director and a discussion on the Commission's subcommittee structure.

The second meeting of the Commission was held on January 26, 2022 via Teams. This meeting was also broadcast on CT-N. Dr. Everette presented to the Commission on "Words & Vocabulary on Equity." The purpose of the presentation was 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 presentation was followed by subcommittee kick-off meetings. Subcommittees have met to determine their meeting cadence and chart their work for the next year.

Executive Director Search

PA 21-35 permits the Commission to request the OLM's assistance in hiring an Executive Director. OLM began the search for an Executive Director in the Fall of 2021. They posted the position on September 2, 2021 and outlined the job duties as follows:

1. Assists the Commission in drafting and adopting by-laws and setting up all structure deemed necessary by the chairs or Commission to carry out its mission.

2. Assists Commission in developing and implementing a strategic plan and meeting the goals of that plan.
3. Is responsible for assuring that timely reports are submitted to the Key Legislative committees
4. Under the guidelines of the OLM, hires and trains employees and volunteers, engages vendors and contractors.
5. In conjunction with the OLM oversees the Commissions budget and assures appropriate expenditures.
6. Is responsible for Community Engagement.
7. Is responsible for Reporting and Public Relations.

The full job posting is included with this report. OLM interviewed 13 individuals and notified the Co-Chairs in early November that they had selected three finalists, but one removed themselves from consideration before the final set of interviews. The Co-Chairs then interviewed both individuals and chose a final candidate to be confirmed by the full Commission at their meeting on January 26th, 2022. Unfortunately, the candidate told OLM on January 25th that they had taken another employment opportunity.

OLM restarted the recruitment process and stated they would come back to the Commission in a couple months with a new finalist for their consideration.

Subcommittee Structure

Members agreed to establish the following subcommittees: Structural Racism in Laws, Regulation, State Business & Hiring (Aligns with Recommendations #1 & 6), Criminal Justice (Aligns with Recommendation #2), Public Health, Health Outcomes and Healthy Living (Aligns with Recommendations #3, 4, & 7), and Zoning (Aligns with Recommendation #5). They also created a Bylaw Subcommittee. These subcommittees will hold their first meetings no later than February.

Subcommittee membership is as follows:

Structural Racism in Laws, Regulation, State Business & Hiring	Criminal Justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hilda Santiago ▪ Heather Aaron ▪ Astread Ferron-Poole ▪ Steven Hernández ▪ Victoria Veltri <p><i>Staffed by OPM</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leonard Jahad ▪ Kean Zimmerman ▪ Vannessa Dorantes ▪ Diana Reyes ▪ Craig Burns ▪ Marc Pelka ▪ Kenyatta Muzzani <p><i>Staffed by Health Equity Solutions</i></p>

Public Health, Health Outcomes and Healthy Living	Zoning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tiffany Donelson ▪ Chavon Hamilton ▪ Melissa Santos ▪ Mary Daugherty Abrams ▪ Jonathan Steinberg ▪ John Frassinelli ▪ Tammy Hendricks ▪ Heather Aaron ▪ Claudio Gualtieri <p><i>Staffed by Health Equity Solutions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carline Charmelus ▪ Travis Simms ▪ Kyle Abercrombie ▪ Marina Marmolejo <p>Bruce Wittchen</p> <p><i>Staffed by OPM</i></p>

Through the subcommittee work, members expressed an interest in exploring the following ways to engage the community in the Commission’s work:

- General agreement on getting meaningful input and engagement from those most impacted by solutions, including at the subcommittee level and through presentations.
- Voices of those served is important and their input is vital. The Commission should carefully consider the time/location of meetings to ensure community involvement.
- Explore expansion of the Commission to include additional representation from those with lived experience.
- Consider qualitative research.
- Comment periods critically important to provide overview and feedback.
- Need multiple levels of feedback, including some that can come in quickly, also long-range feedback and input. Use of anonymous surveys was suggested as a short-term opportunity.
- Strategic plan should include strategies for including community voices, e.g., when, and how we meet, virtual and in-person, and how those decisions impact who is involved.

Conclusion

The Racial Equity in Public Health Commission convened a successful kick-off meeting in 2021 and will continue to meet regularly to carry out the duties and responsibilities outlined above. The most immediate action items of the Commission include approving the hire of an Executive Director at their next general meeting and also convening subcommittees.

Once an Executive Director has been hired, their first task will be developing the strategic plan that is required by Section 3 of PA 21-35. The Commission intends to have a report published within six months of the Executive Director’s hire. Members will begin to lay a foundation for the plan through subcommittee work. Efforts at this level will be concentrated on identifying baseline metrics and measurement methods in each focus area. Subcommittees plan to gather input from community

stakeholders and collaborate with individuals who have lived experience. OPM and Health Equity Solutions will also continue to provide direct administrative support to the Commission until the Executive Director has been officially hired.