



DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL RACISM WITHIN CONNECTICUT STATE GOVERNMENT

**Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health
Connecticut General Assembly
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish leadership buy-in to set the tone for state agencies to advance racial equity work.
2. Build infrastructure to support racial equity work in government.
3. Require state agencies to develop equity plans to identify racial inequities which exist internally, and to outline steps to address them.
4. Commit to increasing equity in the workforce throughout the hiring, retention, and promotion processes.
5. Implement regular training and mentoring opportunities for employees on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6. Conduct assessments and examine policies and practices with a racial equity lens.
7. Engage with members of underrepresented communities and use their contributions to inform how state agencies can make services and operations more equitable.
8. Ensure language and communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate to serve the needs of all communities.
9. Ensure that Connecticut's commitment to racial equity extends to the state's contracting and procurement practices.

FOREWORD

The Coronavirus pandemic, coupled with the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, laid bare the effects of racism and disproportionate loss of life of people of color.^{1,2} As a result, local and state governments throughout the country vowed to take a stand against racism. Connecticut was no exception. In the 2021 legislative session, the State declared racism a public health crisis and established the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. The Commission was tasked with making recommendations to eliminate the impact of racism on health outcomes, social drivers of health, and government operations.

While Connecticut has made great strides,³ there are undoubtedly vestiges of segregation and racial hierarchy in our systems. Although current generations of policymakers and government actors did not build these systems, they have the power to help remedy these historical wrongs. As government actors, we bear responsibility for making changes to these systems to ensure that race or ethnicity does not hinder the ability to secure employment, or a contract with the State, or negatively impact the ability to seek and receive State services.

Agencies across the state are in various stages of implementing or comprehending changes to advance equity. Regardless of any individual agency's point of progress, it is reassuring to know there is an intragovernmental commitment towards achieving racial equity and that there are examples to follow from other state governments and sister-agencies.

This report offers practical recommendations to ensure Connecticut's agencies have the necessary infrastructure and guidance to serve residents equitably, and to cement Connecticut as a national leader in terms of fairness and justice. Implementation of these recommendations is a recurrent choice, as leaders are required to revisit data to evaluate whether their strategies are reducing inequities, or if they must seek new strategies. Untangling decades of racially inequitable policies and practices will take time and intentionality, which can result in significant, long-term positive effects for all Connecticut residents.



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¹ The Covid Tracking Project, *Connecticut: All Race & Ethnicity Data*, accessed November 7, 2023. <https://covidtracking.com/data/state/connecticut/race-ethnicity>

² United States Census Bureau, *COVID-19 Impacts on Mortality by Race/Ethnicity and Sex*, accessed November 7, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/06/covid-19-impacts-on-mortality-by-race-ethnicity-and-sex.html#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20largest%20mortality,direction%20of%20change%20across%20groups>.

³ State of Connecticut, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, *Connecticut Civil Rights Law Chronology*, accessed November 7, 2023. <https://portal.ct.gov/CHRO/Legal/Legal/Connecticut-Civil-Rights-Law-Chronology>

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DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL RACISM WITHIN CONNECTICUT STATE GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to [C.G.S. § 19a-133c](#), the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health is tasked with reporting best practices that state agencies can implement to reduce racial inequities and dismantle structural racism¹ within state government. Per [C.G.S. § 1-79](#), a state agency is defined as “any office, department, board, council, commission, institution, constituent unit of the state system of higher education, technical education and career school or other agency in the executive, legislative or judicial branch of state government.” This report offers a list of practices and policies that can reduce racial inequities in government and its programs.

The Commission has consulted with state agencies, studied nationwide resources and strategies, and spoken with thought leaders to explore what is being done within Connecticut and around the country. The agencies and institutions in this report have been chosen following a landscape analysis of innovative ideas that can be implemented across Connecticut state government agencies.

The recommendations discussed are informed by current or proposed efforts in the federal government, the state of Oregon, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), and within Connecticut's own state agencies. Since 2021, the federal government has employed a transformative "whole-of-government" approach in an attempt to ensure that equity is considered holistically and implemented into every level of the executive branch. The state of Oregon has followed the same "whole-of-government" approach, transplanting the federal government's efforts into its own state infrastructure and processes.

While other states have also begun their journey with infusing equity into their operations, Oregon is an early adopter and a leading example of how the federal government's equity initiatives can be replicated on a state level. Similarly, the NCSC's guidelines have also recommended cementing racial equity throughout court systems holistically. Examples of racial equity work from

¹ Structural racism is defined in C.G.S. § 19a-133c as "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."

Connecticut state agencies are provided throughout the report. These initiatives could be scaled up and implemented across agencies should Connecticut embark on the same transformative "whole-of-government" approach.

The examples provided in this report are each tailored to their own organizational context. However, there are overarching commonalities in the approaches to address existing racial inequities. Both philosophical and financial investments are required to have a sustained impact. Additionally, the state will need to commit to the consistent collection of standardized racial, ethnic, and language data in order to measure and identify inequities and to track progress. The examples and nine recommendations provided are not exhaustive, but if implemented, would provide a foundation for advancing racial equity in state government. The best practices outlined in this report could be executed through administrative decision-making or mandated through legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP BUY-IN TO SET THE TONE FOR STATE AGENCIES TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY WORK

To dismantle structural racism in state government, leaders must clearly communicate their commitment to make the necessary policy and program changes. This recommendation defines "leadership" broadly, but it is envisaged to be applicable to any government leader with decision-making power and influence in their respective departments, branches, and offices.

Federal government example:

On January 20, 2021, in his first day in office, President Joe Biden signed Executive Order 13985, "[Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Throughout the Federal Government](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01753/advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government)." Since then, Biden has maintained that racial equity is a priority for his administration, and that it would be executing a "whole-of-government" approach across all federal agencies.² Biden emphasized that this would require a "multi-generational commitment" and that the efforts outlined would ensure that racial equity be embedded "in all aspects of federal decision-making."³ The President's statements and actions sent a strong message, internally and externally, that advancing racial equity was a government priority.

Connecticut state government example:

Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) has taken a similar approach to emphasizing the importance of implementing racial equity practices within its operations, so much so that racial justice is one of the five strategic goals for the agency.⁴ For over

² Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009 (January 20, 2021).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01753/advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government>

³ Exec. Order No. 14091, 88 Fed. Reg. 10825 (February 16, 2023).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/22/2023-03779/further-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal>

⁴ Department of Children and Families, *Report on the Department of Children and Families' Racial Justice Data, Activities and Strategies*, February 15, 2023, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/RACIAL-JUSTICE/2023/FINALSFY2022CGS17a6e2.pdf>

ten years, the agency has been at the forefront of state efforts to dismantle structural racism by taking considerable action to cement racial equity into its decision-making and operations.⁵ With the help of leaders who have shown a commitment to the cause, DCF has engaged employees in their central office and field offices around the state, as well as their external partners.⁶ DCF's equity initiatives follow evidence-based practices. The implementation science model that guides DCF's work shows the components necessary for successful advancement of racial equity: data-driven system interventions, training and coaching for personnel, and leadership buy-in.⁷

DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes has been especially active in advancing racial equity as evidenced by her participation at events, roundtables, and conversations regarding racial inequities within her agency. Under her leadership, the agency has diversified personnel and created sub-committees responsible for advancing racial equity within the agency.⁸ Supporting Commissioner Dorantes' leadership, Deputy Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly has been an Executive Sponsor of DCF's racial justice work, where she helps lead the agency's Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup.⁹

National Center for State Courts example:

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) is a non-profit organization that strives to improve the administration of justice and offers advice and guidance to courts around the United States and internationally. In February 2023, NCSC launched [The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts](#) ("the RJ Tool" or "the Tool") that allows for state courts to conduct anonymous self-assessments of the current status of racial equity efforts in their courthouses.¹⁰ The results of the self-assessments help state court systems to understand where they are on their racial justice journey. The accompanying guidance allows institutions to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to follow best practices to support and improve increased efforts in this area.¹¹ The RJ Tool was developed by the NCSC's Blueprint for Racial Justice, a group formed in 2021 to examine systemic changes and support state court leaders in their racial justice efforts.¹² Connecticut's Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson has worked extensively with the NCSC

⁵ Monica Rams (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Connecticut Department of Children and Families), meeting notes, meeting with Muna Abbas, March 27, 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Deputy Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly (Deputy Commissioner of Administration (Connecticut Department of Children and Families), Monica Rams (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Connecticut Department of Children and Families), meeting notes, meeting with Muna Abbas and Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, October 13, 2023.

⁸ Rams, meeting notes.

⁹ Rams, Hill-Lilly, meeting notes.

¹⁰ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*, Williamsburg, VA: Author, 2023. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/racial-justice/racialjusticeassessment>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² National Center for State Courts, *Blueprint for Racial Justice*, accessed August 14, 2023. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/racial-justice/blueprint-for-racial-justice>

on their racial justice work and co-chairs the Blueprint for Racial Justice Fairness & Awareness Working Group, which helped author the Tool.

The RJ Tool is specifically designed for court leaders to gain an understanding of the status of racial equity efforts internally, allowing them to identify where more work needs to be done. In the Tool, the term “court leaders” is broadly defined to include judges, court administrators, human resource officials, DEI professionals, or any other cultural or organizational leaders.¹³ The guidance emphasizes the need for leadership to publish statements of support for racial justice work within the court system.¹⁴ Furthermore, the guidance supports increasing racial diversity in state court leadership teams so that they may be reflective of the communities they serve.¹⁵ The RJ tool is a useful resource which state agencies can use or replicate to assess their own racial equity efforts and plan for improvement.

Vocal and visible support for equitable reforms from leadership and their representatives sets the tone across government and increases the likelihood of success.

¹³ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT RACIAL EQUITY WORK IN GOVERNMENT

Dismantling structural racism within state government requires infrastructure to execute the work and implement changes. State agencies should create offices and positions dedicated to advancing racial equity, which will endure personnel and leadership changes. Racial equity infrastructure also allows for there to be an intentional focal point to internally guide, support, and lead state agencies as they navigate incorporating racial equity into their operations.

Federal government example:

Executive Order 13985 outlined measures that included the creation of positions and teams responsible for ensuring that racial equity be present in all aspects of federal agency work. A subsequent [Executive Order 14091](#), published in February 2023, further developed the Biden administration's pledge to tackle racial inequities in federal government. This more recent executive order created a "White House Steering Committee on Equity" to coordinate government-wide efforts to advance equity.¹⁶ It also required federal agencies to create their own "Agency Equity Teams" to oversee efforts in their respective agencies. The teams are designed to include operations and management officials from areas such as policy, public engagement, budget, and data.¹⁷ The language in the executive order shows that the Executive branch intended to weave racial equity throughout the missions and objectives of all federal agencies.¹⁸ The formation of a chain of command that ranges from Agency Equity Teams, to the White House Steering Committee, to the President himself, not only allows for a synchronization of efforts, but also facilitates accountability and monitoring of the "whole-of-government" approach. Moreover, the infrastructure provides opportunities to explore interagency collaboration and the sharing of best practices.

¹⁶ Exec. Order No. 14091.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Also in the federal government, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) internally established the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (ODEIA).¹⁹ This office was tasked with forming government-wide priorities and a strategic plan to increase diversity in the federal workforce.

Oregon government example:

Led by Governor Brown in 2020, Oregon established the Office of Cultural Change to centralize and standardize inclusion of racial equity efforts into state agencies. In 2021, the State published its first DEI Action Plan.²⁰ Strategy 2 of the plan, *State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Infrastructure*, outlines why building infrastructure is imperative to coordinate, operationalize, and achieve racial equity goals in state government.²¹ The action plan recommends that an office or dedicated personnel create agency-wide racial equity plans, create equity goals, analyze service and program delivery to reduce disparities, and provide strategic advice and internal support agency-wide.²² The strategy emphasizes the need to support any staff or infrastructure put in place and to empower them to contribute to key decisions.²³

Connecticut state government examples:

Some Connecticut state agencies have already created positions, teams, and offices dedicated to racial equity work. These agencies have used this infrastructure to help with policy and program development, hiring and training, and strategic planning.

DCF began its journey with embedding racial equity into the agency ten years ago. Since then, through continuous buy-in from leadership, and support from staff and external coaches, the state agency has built infrastructure such as a central [Racial Justice website](#), and appointed dedicated personnel to the mission.²⁴ At the agency, the Office of Multicultural Affairs²⁵, Office of Diversity and Equity²⁶, and Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup, have done impactful work to entrench their commitment to equity into the ethos of DCF. The offices and workgroup were created to determine areas needing improvement. They also work to develop and implement equity and diversity practices within DCF.²⁷ The director, who jointly oversees both offices, regularly

¹⁹ United States Office of Personnel Management, *Equity Action Plan*, January 20, 2022.

https://assets.performance.gov/cx/equity-action-plans/2022/EO%2013985_OPM_Equity%20Action%20Plan_2022.pdf

²⁰ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*, September 23-24, 2021.

https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/Commission/Documents/2021-09_Item-2_Directors-Report_Attachment-A_DEI-Action-Plan.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hill-Lilly, Rams, meeting notes

²⁵ Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Office of Multicultural Affairs, accessed August 25, 2023. <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Multicultural-Affairs/Home>

²⁶ Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Office of Diversity and Equity, accessed August 25, 2023. <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/ODE/Home>

²⁷ Rams, meeting notes.

consults with the agency's leadership from the area offices, the two facilities, and divisions around the state including the central office on how to ensure DCF equitably serves everyone who interacts with the agency.²⁸ Many of the DCF initiatives detailed in this report originated in the offices above. It is beneficial for state agencies to carve out an office dedicated to racial equity to liaise directly with leadership and be the central hub to guide the agency towards achieving racial equity goals.

Like DCF, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) has created an Office of Multicultural Health Equity focused on making sure services are fair and accessible to all.²⁹ This office is responsible for conducting regular agency strategic plans, ensuring that employees have adequate training regarding cultural differences, and leading efforts to ensure language and translation services are available.³⁰

The Department of Public Health (DPH) was mandated by the legislature to establish an Office of Health Equity (OHE) that is tasked with embedding racial equity into the agency's operations. OHE's strategy to eliminate health disparities and achieve health equity focuses on the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, age, and die. These conditions are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and other resources. The OHE's [website](#) states that social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the differences in health status seen within and between communities.³¹ OHE is key to DPH's infrastructure to address equity, as it offers a go-to resource in the agency for health equity expertise.

Recently, the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) and the University of Connecticut's School of Public Policy (UConn SPP) joined together to examine how to increase racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in state hiring. In 2021, they presented recommendations to the Governor's Council on Women and Girls on how the state could respond to an anticipated wave of retirements in July 2022.³² Their recommendations included the creation of a government-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan to diversify state hiring. This project would be overseen by a Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer (Chief DEI Officer) – a new role – who would report directly to the Governor and a newly formed Equity Advisory Committee. This Committee would assess whether state agencies were meeting their diversity goals. While these recommendations

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, *Office of Multicultural Health Equity*, accessed August 16, 2023. <https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Divisions/Divisions/Multicultural-Healthcare-Equity-OMHE>

³⁰ Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Office of Multicultural Health Equity, *2021-2023 OMHE and MCAC Strategic Goals and Objectives*, accessed August 24, 2023.

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DMHAS/OMHE/MCAC-2021-2023-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

³¹ Connecticut Department of Public Health, *Office of Health Equity*, accessed September 20, 2023.

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Workforce--Professional-Development/Office-of-Health-Equity/Office-of-Health-Equity>

³² State of Connecticut, Governor's Council on Women and Girls, *The Future of Pay Equity and Representation in Connecticut's Executive Branch*, accessed August 25, 2021. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Working-Groups/Council-on-Women-and-Girls/20210825-Attachment-1.pdf>

have not been enacted or implemented, the recommendation of having a central person or team focused on DEI-related operations is similar to others seen in this section.

At the Judicial Branch, a DEI Unit was formed in early 2023 to lead and be a hub for any matters relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.³³ The unit aims to increase diversity in hiring, examine disparities, and ensure that culturally responsive practices are implemented throughout the branch.³⁴ Having only been in existence for less than a year, the office intends to lead and oversee the Judicial Branch's work on DEI.

National Center for State Courts example:

The guidance put forward by the RJ tool stresses the need for organizations to provide the support necessary to implement their DEI plans.³⁵

The RJ Tool stipulates that organizations should designate resources for offices dedicated to racial equity work. These resources include physical spaces, staffing to monitor and evaluate the implementation of racial equity goals, and financial support for the operations and prioritization of instilling racial equity values throughout an organization.³⁶ The report also notes that financial support should be allocated for technological resources, such as websites and data collection infrastructure. Such technological resources will help the coordination of racial equity work in an organization.³⁷

The examples above highlight the need to create infrastructure to help operationalize racial equity work in government. Infrastructure includes the appropriate personnel and organizational positioning to implement and oversee equity initiatives.

³³Troy Brown (Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, State of Connecticut Judicial Branch), Brian Hill (Executive Director of Administrative Services, State of Connecticut Judicial Branch), meeting notes, meeting with Muna Abbas and Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, July 11, 2023.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

REQUIRE STATE AGENCIES TO DEVELOP AGENCY EQUITY PLANS TO IDENTIFY INEQUITIES WHICH EXIST INTERNALLY AND TO OUTLINE STEPS TO ADDRESS THEM

Policymakers and government leaders will need to examine and overhaul policies and practices to correct decades of barriers that have disadvantaged communities of color for generations. To accomplish this goal, agencies need to conduct in-depth organizational reviews, analyses of existing practices, and form strategies to outline the long-term path to change. Agencies must also consistently collect racial, ethnic, and language data to identify disparities, set equity goals, and monitor progress. Data should be collected and broken down by consistent racial and ethnic categories to allow long-term monitoring. Pursuant to [C.G.S. § 19a-754d](#), state agencies who provide health and social services are now required to collect demographic data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and language.³⁸ In order to support effective racial equity plans, it is recommended that this law be broadened to apply to all state agencies. Organizational equity plans are a helpful tool to not only confront and identify current inequities, but to also detail and explore opportunities to correct them. Routine use of equity plans provides a clear path for how operations and processes will be done differently, and how progress will be measured. Without them, agencies are more likely to revert to traditional practices that will continue to lead to inequitable outcomes.

Federal government example:

In Executive Order 14091, President Biden mandated federal agencies to annually submit *Equity Action Plans*.³⁹ These plans are to include an examination of the barriers faced by underserved communities in accessing an agency's services and programs, along with a plan to create new or revised policies to address those barriers.⁴⁰ In addition, agencies are required to specify the efforts being made to engage with underserved communities through "accessible, culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach."⁴¹ The equity plans are public documents that can be accessed on a centralized [website](#).

³⁸ C.G.S. § 19a-754d

³⁹ Exec. Order No. 14091.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The executive order also directs the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to submit a report outlining best practices of other federal agencies, and to make recommendations as to how to implement them across the federal government.⁴² This not only allows for agencies to duplicate successful initiatives from sister-agencies, but also provides an opportunity for interagency collaboration and review. The President's directive to OMB further underscores the objective of having a coordinated whole-of-government approach.

Oregon government example:

Oregon has implemented a similar strategy and put together a [state-wide DEI plan](#).⁴³ Their first plan, published in 2021, aimed to normalize racial justice efforts within state operations, and to prioritize and cement racial equity at the forefront.⁴⁴ It required state agencies in Oregon to develop their own specific equity plans incorporating the strategies in the state-wide plan. In doing so, agencies were encouraged to: identify systemic and institutional barriers in hiring; partner and engage with policymakers and the communities they serve; develop solutions to improve policy and delivery of services; and share and scale up efforts with sister-agencies.⁴⁵

"The DEI Action plan does not prescribe racial equity outcomes of each agency as it will vary between programs, services, infrastructure, planning. Rather, the DEI Action Plan is intended to complement agencies' existing equity initiatives and provide guidance to agencies just embarking on the journey, threading the collective equity initiatives across the state."⁴⁶

- Oregon Diversity Equity and Inclusion Plan, 2021

Connecticut state government examples:

In the 2022 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly [legislated](#) that the Governor's budget shall include an equity statement that will offer, "an explanation of the manner in which provisions of the budget further the Governor's efforts to ensure equity in the state."⁴⁷ The first statement, produced in the 2023 session, provided an account of investments in the Governor's budget aimed at furthering equity.

⁴² Executive Office of the President of the United States, Office of Management and Budget, *Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President*, July 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.1.pdf

⁴³ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*. August 2021.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁷ [C.G.S. § 4-74a](#)

This year, the state of Connecticut and the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) announced the launch of an [equity study](#) across all state agencies in accordance with [Public Act 21-2 Sec. 81\(b\)](#) of the June Special Session. The legislation states that the study shall "examine the best methods, consistent with applicable law, to assist state agencies in assessing equity with respect to race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and disability."⁴⁸ Referencing the efforts of the federal government, the Connecticut General Assembly required the study to identify inequities in outcomes in services and programs, and make recommendations to remedy them and prevent them from re-occurring.⁴⁹ CHRO has specified that the study will engage Connecticut residents, particularly those who are underserved, through focus groups.⁵⁰ CHRO has also been tasked with completing a disparity study that will look at whether minoritized groups have equal business opportunities to contract with the state of Connecticut.⁵¹ If a disparity is identified, the study will determine whether it is significant enough to require action.⁵² Both CHRO studies are attempts to gather a comprehensive outlook at where inequities lie, and what actions should be taken to remediate them.

[Per C.G.S. § 17a-6e](#), DCF must publish an annual report regarding utilization of the agency's services by race and ethnicity.⁵³ Since they first began in 2019, the legislative reports have functioned in a similar way as a racial equity plan for DCF.⁵⁴ The annual reports provide race and ethnicity data, identify trends of racial and ethnic disparities, and detail the activities and strategies the agency has employed to reduce those disparities.⁵⁵ DCF leaders believe that these reports are a useful "score card" to help keep track of how successful the agency is in meeting its racial justice goals.⁵⁶

The UConn SPP and OSC hiring practice [recommendations](#) include the creation of a statewide strategic plan supported by dedicated personnel and teams.⁵⁷ The strategic plan would be the result of a comprehensive assessment where hiring practices and policies, promotion, retention, professional development, and other human resource instruments are examined for improvements to help meet diversity goals. Plans are to include concrete action steps and timelines to facilitate monitoring and accountability. Dedicated staff should periodically review their agency's plan and report on progress and outcomes.

⁴⁸ Public Act 21-2 Sec. 81(e)(1)(A) p. 101-102.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ State of Connecticut, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, CHRO Building Equity in Connecticut, *Get Involved: Focus Groups*, accessed September 20, 2023.

https://portal.ct.gov/equitystudy/Get-Involved?language=en_US

⁵¹ State of Connecticut, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, *Building Business Equality in Connecticut, What is a Disparity Study?* accessed October 16, 2023.

https://portal.ct.gov/disparitystudy/Knowledge-Base/Articles/What-is-a-disparity-study?language=en_US

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ C.G.S. § 17a-6e

⁵⁴ ⁵⁴ Department of Children and Families, *Report on the Department of Children and Families' Racial Justice Data, Activities and Strategies*.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Hill-Lilly, Rams, meeting notes

⁵⁷ State of Connecticut, Governor's Council on Women and Girls, *The Future of Pay Equity and Representation in Connecticut's Executive Branch*.

National Center for State Courts example:

The NCSC has also recommended the use of equity plans to create an "operational reality."⁵⁸ The plans would identify "specific racial equity, diversity, and inclusion goals" and "[establish] accountability mechanisms for achieving those goals."⁵⁹ The RJ Tool gives examples of items equity plans could contain, such as establishing DEI positions, measuring and tracking inequities, improving access to programs and services to underserved communities, and taking steps to increase diversity in the workforce.⁶⁰ The guidance recommends that a formal position is created to oversee the creation of the equity plan, and the subsequent implementation of the recommendations contained within.⁶¹ This not only ensures that an individual or team has the capacity to carry out the task, but is also valuable in terms of showing that an agency or organization is committed to a comprehensive equity plan.⁶²

Equity plans serve an important role in providing a snapshot of the current inner workings of government organizations and how they can be improved. Plans should include a review of weaknesses in infrastructure, policies, practices, and human resource functions. Plans should be easily accessible to the public for transparency and accountability, both key components in fostering trust. Equity plans guide and assist in the identification and prioritization of reform needs. Plans should be easily accessible to the public for transparency and accountability. Over time, it is the goal that agency equity plans and reports will document efforts and initiatives taken by state government to dismantle structural racism.

⁵⁸ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

RECOMMENDATION 4:

COMMIT TO INCREASING EQUITY IN THE WORKFORCE THROUGHOUT THE HIRING, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION PROCESSES

A diverse state governmental workforce, across all position levels, is crucial to achieving racial equity. State agencies should strive to increase diversity in the workforce, not only for representation, but to also bring different perspectives, life experiences, and identities to the decision-making table. Diversity goes beyond representation and is about improving the quality and accessibility of state services. True diversity in state hiring not only aims to get the racial demographics of employees to be reflective of the population, but also ensures that people of color hold leadership and well-paid positions.

Federal government example:

The federal government has introduced a variety of ways to evaluate its efforts to improve equity and diversity in hiring practices. An example can be found with the OPM's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (ODEIA), which consults with current federal employees from underserved communities to hear about barriers to employment and opportunities for growth.⁶³ Another method being used at the federal level is conducting retrospective reviews of candidates who applied for a job vacancy. After a position is filled, Applicant Flow Data (AFD) collected through the employment process is audited and analyzed by looking at the demographics of those who applied and examining how far candidates went in the interview process. Initial AFD findings have shown that there is a considerable reduction in the diversity of applicants as the hiring journey progresses.⁶⁴ Applying a similar approach in Connecticut could provide important insight into hiring patterns in the state.

⁶³ United States Office of Personnel Management, *Equity Action Plan*, Washington, DC, January 20, 2022. https://assets.performance.gov/cx/equity-action-plans/2022/EO%2013985_OPM_Equity%20Action%20Plan_2022.pdf

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Oregon government example:

Oregon has taken a similar approach of using data to track diversity in state hiring. The state's DEI plan has recommended that agencies use disaggregated data to "track and monitor hiring processes, including recruitment, interview practices, and hiring outcomes."⁶⁵ Further, the plan recommends that agencies provide professional development and training opportunities aimed at diversifying leadership and provide DEI training for all employees.⁶⁶

Connecticut state government examples:

In Connecticut, DCF has led the state by taking important steps to ensure that its workforce is diverse. DCF has established the use of gender-, racially-, and ethnically- diverse hiring panels for candidate interviews. The Department uses the state CoreCT database to identify employees who currently hold a position which is at the same level, or higher as the job opening to serve as panelists.⁶⁷ If assembling a diverse panel is not possible, hiring committees must document their efforts to put one together and explain why they could not do so.⁶⁸ Given how diverse DCF is as an agency, it has been able to institute diverse hiring panels relatively easily.⁶⁹ However, because this may not be the case in other agencies, interagency hiring panels may facilitate this endeavor by creating a larger pool of potential interviewers.

Another way DCF has made its workforce more diverse is by hiring employees who are bilingual. Language skills are valuable in the workplace and can surmount communication barriers with the people an agency serves. Sourcing candidates who speak more than one language and recognizing language skills as relevant job skills in the hiring process can also help increase diversity in the state workforce.

In a similar fashion, the authors of the UConn SPP and OSC report believed that the potential recruitment drive to replenish the state workforce could serve as an opportunity to implement new equitable hiring and pay policies and practices, specifically surrounding race and gender. The 2021 report [*The Future of Pay Equity and Representation in Connecticut's Executive Branch*](#), identified the inequities that exist within state employment by examining the demographics of employees and the types of positions they held. The data showed that there is an appropriate gender balance in government employment, but there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic, Black, and Asian employees. The report also noted inequities in the racial composition of employees within upper-level job classifications. Lastly, the report provided agency-specific analyses that could be used by individual agencies to address existing inequities.⁷⁰

Recommendations by the OSC and UConn SPP on diversity in state hiring addressed the need to create "aspirational" diversity goals that would result in the composition of state agencies' workforces mirroring the demographics of the state's population. These goals would be separate

⁶⁵ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rams, meeting notes.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ State of Connecticut, Governor's Council on Women and Girls, *The Future of Pay Equity and Representation in Connecticut's Executive Branch*.

from affirmative action goals and plans currently required by CHRO pursuant to [section 46a-68-76](#) of the Connecticut state agency regulations.⁷¹ Affirmative action goals use the composition of a regional workforce in a specific field to gauge its diversity, while aspirational goals use data on the racial and ethnic makeup of the geographical region. If a professional field is not sufficiently diverse, the affirmative action formula can mask a lack of diversity and perpetuate the status quo. The OSC and UConn SPP recommended that state agencies use the aspirational diversity figures to measure the diversity of their agency's workforce and determine if any racial/ethnic or gender groups are underrepresented. Agencies are then encouraged to create an action plan to address any identified disparities. Plans may include broader workforce diversification strategies to ensure there is a diverse pool of qualified candidates for future government employment.

The OSC and UConn SPP recommended the establishment of state partnerships to spur the recruitment of individuals from underrepresented communities. This would involve working with Black and Hispanic serving institutions such as colleges and community organizations, while offering more paid internships and apprenticeships in those communities.⁷²

On the heels of the OSC and UConn SPP report, a legislative *Taskforce to Study the State Workforce and Retiring Employees* was set up prior to the surge in state retirements in the summer of 2022. The taskforce produced a "*Toolkit for Success: Planning, Retaining, and Diversifying a 21st Century State Workforce*"⁷³ (Toolkit) which adopted the recommendations of the prior report.

National Center for State Courts example:

The guidance by the NCSC has explicitly referenced the need to have diverse hiring in a racially equitable space, and to make sure that the court system remains an attractive workplace for diverse candidates.⁷⁴ To gain a better understanding of where racial and ethnic groups are underrepresented in the workforce, the report recommends that organizations use data to identify demographic patterns in the workforce and the hiring process, and to find ways to reach out to those communities to encourage them to seek employment with them.⁷⁵ Some of the strategies outlined to facilitate diverse hiring are: using objective grading rubrics with clearly defined criteria; eliminating the use of factors that can unintentionally harm marginalized groups such as "culture fits"; limiting or ending the use of referral hiring; and making sure that those involved in hiring processes are "trained and empowered to spot bias."⁷⁶ Beyond hiring, the guidance offers suggestions to ensure that the workplace remains an environment focused on racial equity and

⁷¹ [Conn. Regs. § 46a-68-76 \(2015\)](#)

⁷² State of Connecticut, Governor's Council on Women and Girls, *The Future of Pay Equity and Representation in Connecticut's Executive Branch*, pp. 28-29

⁷³ State of Connecticut, Governor's Council on Women and Girls, *Toolkit for Success: Planning, Retaining and Diversifying a 21st Century State Workforce*, Hartford, CT, March 15, 2022. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Working-Groups/Council-on-Women-and-Girls/20210825-Attachment-1.pdf>

⁷⁴ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 58-60, 62.

eliminating bias by conducting regular assessments of employee experiences to identify any incidents or encounters that led them to feel uncomfortable or not included.⁷⁷

The efforts and studies outlined in this section offer an array of options for ensuring that the workforce reflects the demographics of the state's population. It is evident that consistent monitoring of hiring practices, intentional attempts to make processes more equitable, and identifying where disparities take place in the process are key to achieving diversity.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPLEMENT REGULAR TRAINING AND MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES AROUND DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Embedding a workforce culture that is attuned to racial equity requires proactively training employees to be aware of biases that exist on a personal and systematic level. In state government, professional development opportunities are generally offered to government employees on an array of subjects, some of which are mandatory.

State agencies should expand on their DEI trainings for new and existing employees to help them recognize that racial equity is an important value and goal. Not only should trainings be compulsory, but they should also be tailored to an agency's needs and services. Implementing this not only establishes DEI and racial equity as a cornerstone of values for an agency, but it also sets expectations to employees about how they should operate with equity in mind – both on a personal level with their colleagues, and professionally in how they approach their work and any external relationships.

Training can provide employees the tools to recognize and reflect on their own subconscious biases, which is essential to lessening biases in the workplace. It is important that DEI training for employees is recurrent, and the curriculum is routinely updated as language and culture evolve.

Federal government example:

In June 2021, Biden published Executive Order 14035, "[Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/06/30/2021-14127/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce)," which paid close attention to the need for DEI training within the federal workforce.⁷⁸ The order mandated that federal agencies use DEI trainings to inform employees about "systemic and institutional racism and bias against underserved communities" while exploring their understanding of implicit and unconscious bias.⁷⁹ It was the

⁷⁸ United States, Executive Office of the President Joseph Biden, *Executive Order 14035: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*, June 25, 2021. Federal Register, Vol. 86, No. 123, p. 34599, Exec. Order No. 14035, 86 Fed. Reg. 34593 (June 25, 2021).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/06/30/2021-14127/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Biden administration's hope that this would translate into cohesive and respectful interpersonal relationships in the workplace, while also making employees cognizant of inequities within their line of work. Two years later, the federal government further cemented the use of DEI training opportunities by tasking the newly formed Agency Equity Teams with supporting equity training and equity leadership within the scope of their work.⁸⁰

Oregon government example:

Within Oregon's DEI action plan, Strategy 8 (*Diversifying the Workforce and Creating an Inclusive Workplace*) touches on the need for DEI professional development opportunities to "align agencies to standardized and inclusive practices," particularly with regard to the culture and work ethos of government.⁸¹ Alongside this, Oregon's plan also recommends providing additional continuous training for employees as a way to encourage the promotion and retention of racially diverse employees and support leadership pathways.⁸²

Connecticut state government examples:

Diversity training is compulsory across Connecticut state government pursuant to [C.G.S. § 46a-54](#) and [C.G.S. § 4a-2c](#). However, some agencies have gone further than what is statutorily required of them and made trainings available on an array of subjects surrounding diversity and racial equity.

Through DCF's Academy for Workforce Development, employees attend cultural diversity and implicit bias training to reinforce the agency's commitment to racial equity and to set employee behavioral expectations.⁸³ Within DCF's Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup there is a subcommittee dedicated to the workforce which reviews employee trainings using a racial equity lens, and routinely asks employees for feedback as to how to improve these trainings.⁸⁴ Working in parallel to this, employees are able to contact the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Diversity and Equity if they experience an interaction or situation that needs to be dealt with in a culturally sensitive manner. This internal coaching resource provides practical and direct advice to employees about how to navigate racial transgressions appropriately and professionally.⁸⁵

The Judicial Branch has a menu of trainings that touch upon diversity and cultural competency for employees. Alongside a compulsory diversity training, employees have access to an array of cultural competency trainings that includes the cornerstone training, *Foundation in Cultural Responsiveness*, and events focused on educating and celebrating diversity (see Appendix A).⁸⁶ Some trainings explore broad subjects such as implicit bias while others

⁸⁰ Exec. Order No. 14091.

⁸¹ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*, p. 22.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rams, meeting notes.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Hill-Lilly, Rams, meeting notes

⁸⁶ Connecticut Judicial Branch, Judicial Branch-Court Support Services Division Cultural Competency: 2023 Summary, Hartford CT, 2023

allow employees to delve deeper into specific topics such as working with a diverse workforce and cross-cultural communication.⁸⁷ The Judicial Branch's offerings have gone further than the mandatory general diversity-focused trainings. The Branch has created trainings and programming that address diversity, equity, and inclusion from different angles.⁸⁸

National Center for State Courts example:

While hiring a diverse workforce is important, the NCSC guidance also focuses on the need to train the current workforce and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement racial equity values within an organization. Before creating and implementing new trainings, the guidance recommends a review of all the current racial justice and equity trainings. Such a review will help identify where additional trainings are needed, and what their focus will be.⁸⁹ When creating new trainings, the report suggests a design that encompasses both the historical roots of racial injustices while also examining the impact implicit bias and structural racism can have in day-to-day interactions in the workplace.⁹⁰ Employees are encouraged to undergo regular trainings on these issues. Participation in regular training allows employees to create a shared understanding of racial justice concepts⁹¹, and to gain a better understanding of their own cultural responsiveness and how it manifests in their interactions with others.⁹²

Professional development is a fundamental part of an employee's experience at work and career progression. Having mandatory trainings focused on areas such as DEI, cultural responsiveness, and racial equity serve as an important tool in making sure that the workforce understands why achieving racial equity is an important value and goal for an organization. However, it is also important that employees understand the importance of scrutinizing their biases and reflecting on how these views may affect their work. With the evolving nature of DEI work, it is imperative that trainings are evaluated and refreshed on an ongoing basis to reflect the changing realities and happenings of the world around us.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Troy Brown (Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, State of Connecticut Judicial Branch), meeting notes, meeting with Muna Abbas, July 21, 2023.

⁸⁹ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Cultural responsiveness is defined as having the ability to “understand that the logic by which we make sense of the world is not (as it often feels) objective or neutral, but rather a particular lens that is grounded in our cultural upbringing.” Ibid. p. 84.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

CONDUCT ASSESSMENTS AND EXAMINE POLICIES AND PRACTICES THROUGH A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

To determine where inequities lie and where to make recommendations for change, state agencies should use a racial equity lens to examine current and proposed policies and practices. Agencies would assess whether certain policies and practices might result in a disparate impact on a racially or ethnically minoritized group.

These assessments would identify which communities are most underserved, whether they could be negatively affected by a policy or practice, and what voices are absent from policy development. To prevent unintended consequences, it is essential that perspectives from underrepresented communities be heard. Assessments or racial equity reviews can help pinpoint strengths and weaknesses, while ultimately having a positive effect on reducing racial disparities.

Oregon government example:

Oregon's DEI plan offers recommendations such as the introduction of regular racial equity assessments when making budgetary decisions.⁹³ The assessments consider whether investments and divestments will harm minoritized communities.⁹⁴

Connecticut state government examples:

Connecticut's Department of Public Health's Office of Health Equity created the "*Health Equity Impact of Legislative Proposals*" worksheet (see Appendix B) to assist staff in understanding the impact proposed legislation could have from a health equity perspective. Department sections that are likely to be impacted programmatically use guided questions to conduct a holistic analysis of legislative proposals including: which underrepresented or historically marginalized populations and communities the proposal may

⁹³ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

affect, the impact to the social and structural factors that may disproportionately impact these people and communities, and whether the proposed legislation is more likely to advance or regress progress toward statewide equity.

Similarly, DCF has mechanisms in place to assess policies and services to evaluate whether they are equitable and suggest solutions for reform, if necessary.⁹⁵ DCF hopes that a careful review of its new and existing policies from a racial equity perspective will ensure that equity is woven into the department's practices. Steps are being taken to infuse racial equity efforts into DCF's day-to-day practices, documents, referrals, case plans, supervisions, culture, and language. Through its internal Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup, DCF's *Policy and Practice* and *Data* subcommittees look at each newly created or updated policy, agency data, and discern where inequities exist and suggest improvements.⁹⁶

In the 2023 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed [Public Act 23-16](#) which looked at the potential impacts of the increased use of artificial intelligence in state government.⁹⁷ The legislation stipulates that beginning in 2024, the Department of Administrative Services shall "perform ongoing assessments of systems that employ artificial intelligence and are in use by state agencies to ensure that no such system shall result in any unlawful discrimination or disparate impact," on groups of individuals on the basis of characteristics including race and ethnicity.⁹⁸ As the use of technology progresses, and more artificial intelligence is used in state government, it is important to monitor and set guardrails to ensure its use does not magnify biases.

National Center for State Courts example:

The NCSC's tool is an assessment of the policies and practices in an organization. However, it is seen as just an initial "baseline system review" to inform next steps in racial justice planning.⁹⁹ The organization recommends that courts perform a Racial Equity Impact Analysis (REIA) before implementation of any new policy to assess whether it would have an adverse (direct or indirect) effect on any racial or ethnic groups.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, using disaggregated data allows for a better understanding of how certain policies or practices impact specific categories of people.¹⁰¹ To drive decision-making and identify where inequities exist, it is imperative we have accurate data and assessments with clearly defined racial and ethnic categories.¹⁰² The data should be routinely reported and monitored to track trends in whether an organization's services and policies help eliminate racial inequities.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ Rams, meeting notes.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ State of Connecticut [Public Act 23-16](#)

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

In the same way that organizations conduct financial analyses to inform decision-making, REIA can be a decisive factor as to whether to implement a policy. REIA can be an effective tool to identify and remove inequities from existing and future practices and policies.

"Preventing institutional racism and identifying new options to remedy long-standing inequities is the goal of REIAs" ¹⁰⁴ – The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts

Embedding racial equity into state government requires a detailed examination of how an agency or branch operates and where disparities become apparent within its operations and management. Continuous assessments can lead to changes in existing policies or the implementation of new policies, thereby dismantling structural inequities in state government.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

ENGAGE WITH MEMBERS OF UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES AND USE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO INFORM HOW STATE AGENCIES CAN MAKE SERVICES AND OPERATIONS MORE EQUITABLE

State government exists to serve its residents. In representative democracies, the voices of residents inform decision-making. However, as a direct result of structural racism, communities of color have historically faced considerable barriers to accessing seats at decision-making tables. As the state works to remove these hurdles, state agencies should engage with communities of color to determine where improvements are needed.

Federal government example:

In President Biden's Executive Order 14091, there was an emphasis on the need to engage with underserved communities and to incorporate their perspectives and lived experiences into the design and reform of agencies' actions, policies, and programs.¹⁰⁵ Further, the order underscored the need to engage with the community by conducting listening sessions tailored to the language and culture of the community, and having contact with people where they live, work, and learn.¹⁰⁶

Oregon government example:

Using community engagement to inform racial equity was echoed in Oregon's DEI plan. The plan focused on policymaking efforts by enlisting trusted messengers to communicate with communities. Doing so would allow the state to deliver messages in mediums most used in those communities and lead to the fostering of trust and partnerships.¹⁰⁷

Connecticut state government examples:

DCF's racial equity work has extended beyond the agency and its employees to their external partners including contractors, and the communities and families the department serves.¹⁰⁸ DCF regularly communicates its commitment to eliminating race-based disparities in its work and receives feedback from the public to inform how it can

¹⁰⁵ Exec. Order No. 14091.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*.

¹⁰⁸ Rams, meeting notes.

improve their services. The department's Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup's sub-committee on service systems focuses on the engagement of the community and external partners.¹⁰⁹ The service systems subcommittee assesses how it can bring in diverse voices to inform its work while also exploring how it conveys their expectations that external providers engage in racial equity work.

National Center for State Courts example:

The NCSC guidance considers external input as a significant source of community-based learning to help navigate how an organization achieves its racial justice goals.¹¹⁰ The RJ tool guidance underscores the importance of defining what community engagement is, and what it would look like in an organization.¹¹¹ In doing so, the report explains that an organization will be better equipped to develop engagement activities that would gather the data and information necessary to inform internal policy and program development and ensure it aligns with its goals.¹¹² Community engagement should be an ongoing process where underrepresented communities are continuously included, creating a feedback loop for an organization's activities, and in turn, building and strengthening relationships between them.¹¹³ By using the insights and perspectives of the community, organizations can ensure that they have considered the effects of their decision-making on those who may be affected, particularly those who are underserved.¹¹⁴ The guidance also expresses the importance of consistently evaluating community engagement efforts to see whether they are effective and impactful.¹¹⁵

Effective and continuous community engagement is fundamental to ensuring that an agency or branch's goals are suitable and serving the needs of the population being served.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*, p. 38

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

ENSURE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS ARE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF ALL COMMUNITIES

A significant component of equitable representation is to ensure communications effectively reach the populations being served. State agencies should provide language translations and interpretations of key documents and announcements and account for cultural differences and varied literacy skills in their communications.¹¹⁶ The latter is accomplished by using plain language rather than technical vocabulary. In addition, understanding how communities with different lived experiences process and react to information is essential to effective communication.

Federal government examples:

The [National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) Standards](#) developed by the federal Office of Minority Health aim to advance health equity by providing "effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs."¹¹⁷ The standards offer a comprehensive set of goals for health providers including having a diverse workforce, providing communications and language assistance, partnering with community groups, and establishing culturally and linguistically appropriate policies and practices.¹¹⁸ The use of culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach was underscored in Executive Order 14091 where the President emphasized the need for agencies to meaningfully engage with underserved communities. He also emphasized the need to include the perspectives and lived experiences of these communities when working to reform the policies and programs of agencies.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Centers for Disease and Control, *Culture and Language*, accessed September 21, 2023.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/culture.html>

¹¹⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Nationally Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Standards*, accessed September 21, 2023. <https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas/standards>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Exec. Order No. 14091.

Connecticut state government example:

DCF works with approved vendors who help translate agency documents for the public, and also consults with leading state immigration organizations such as the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI) and the Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) on how to ensure DCF's language services meet the needs of the members of the communities being served.¹²⁰ In addition to translation, language services include crafting communications and messaging that are in plain, accessible language. Moreover, DCF has a significant proportion of staff who are multilingual to help bridge the language divide.¹²¹ This is beneficial in that it allows for staff to communicate directly with the public in different languages. Shared language can also build trust and restore faith in systems that have had fractured relationships with communities of color. This provides further evidence of the benefit of advancing job candidates who speak more than one language.

Oregon government example:

The state of Oregon has included language and communication efforts as a key part of its DEI Action Plan under Strategy 3, *Inclusive Communications*. It has focused on language access and literacy to make sure that residents with limited English proficiency have access to resources in a language and form they can understand.¹²² This is further emphasized by the plan calling for communications to be delivered by trusted messengers, and through diverse media outlets.¹²³

National Center for State Courts example:

NCSC's work promotes the need to hire multilingual staff, use translation and interpretation services, and have communication forms (e.g. websites, signage, documents) in different languages to facilitate access to services to those with limited English proficiency.¹²⁴ In order to understand whether an organization's services are fully accessible to all, NCSC recommends conducting an assessment (e.g. through a taskforce) to look at the physical, language, financial, and technological barriers that some users may have. Organizations should use the results of such assessments to inform future decision-making.¹²⁵

Achieving racial equity cannot be done without inclusivity and acknowledgment of cultural and linguistic differences. Communication barriers often result from insufficient translation services or the use of jargon. These barriers make it difficult for residents to understand the programs and services available to them. Ultimately, these differences prevent residents from accessing the help they need.

¹²⁰ Rams, meeting notes.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ National Center for State Courts, *The Racial Justice Organizational Assessment Tool for Courts*.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

ENSURE THAT CONNECTICUT'S COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY EXTENDS TO THE STATE'S CONTRACTING AND PROCUREMENT PRACTICES

Government should consider equity in the contracting and procurement process. It is crucial to racial equity that minority-owned businesses have a fair chance at receiving government contracts. To establish the baseline of current government contracting and track progress, the state will need to disaggregate contractor data by race, ethnicity, and gender. For the purposes of achieving equity, it is not sufficient to include all minority-owned businesses and small businesses in one category. The amount of state dollars and contracts awarded should be publicly reported by disaggregated racial/ethnic and gender categories. Additionally, state agencies should review contracting and procurement processes and make plans to ameliorate any barriers that disproportionately impact minorities.

Federal government example:

The federal government has employed an "Advancing Equitable Procurement" strategy to expand procurement opportunities for members of socially and economically disadvantaged groups, primarily by providing them with financial assistance.¹²⁶ In addition, President Biden has set a goal of increasing the number of federal contracts awarded to small business owners from disadvantaged communities to 15% by 2025.¹²⁷ Racial, ethnic, and gender data for current and recent past contractors and awardees is required in order to establish the baseline for improvement.

¹²⁶ Exec. Order No. 14091, pp. 10831

¹²⁷ United States, Executive Office of the President Joseph Biden, *Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Reforms to Increase Equity and Level the Playing Field for Underserved Small Business Owners*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/02/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-reforms-to-increase-equity-and-level-the-playing-field-for-underserved-small-business-owners/>

Oregon government example:

As part of its racial equity plan, Oregon has addressed contract equity by making recommendations to embed an equity lens throughout a project – from its initiation, planning, development, and administration.¹²⁸ On a practical level, this includes the creation of mentoring programs to support minority-owned businesses, implementation of prompt payment processes, and the provision of trainings and assistance to minority-owned businesses so that they are more likely to contract with the state.¹²⁹ The goal of Oregon's racial equity plan is to eliminate or reduce the numerous bureaucratic barriers that business owners from specific groups face when met with the prospect of working with government.

Connecticut state government example:

In Connecticut, DCF has taken several steps to ensure contracting and procurement is more equitable. The department regularly updates request for proposal (RFP) questions to remove the advantage of familiarity from previous contract awardees, ask RFP applicants to report the diversity of their workforce, and inquire about their commitment to racial equity within the applicant's business or entity.¹³⁰ Additionally, DCF offers informational and training support to providers from underrepresented communities to become certified contractors with the state so that they can be paid prospectively for their work rather than retroactively.¹³¹

Examining contracting and procurement practices using a racial equity lens is a key aspect of eliminating structural racism within state government. There are three distinct aspects that need to be addressed in order to achieve equity in contracting: 1) agencies must commit to contracting with a greater proportion of minority-owned businesses, 2) agencies must eliminate barriers to contracting whenever practicable, and 3) contractors, as extensions of the state, should be held to the same equity standards as any other state actor.

¹²⁸ State of Oregon, *State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan*.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rams, meeting notes.

¹³¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL RACISM WITHIN GOVERNMENT IS A HUGE ENDEAVOR THAT REQUIRES A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH:

This endeavor begins with buy-in from **leadership** who can set a vision and issue directives.

Financial, physical, and personnel resources need to be allocated to cement equity **infrastructure** in state agencies which can withstand changes in leadership and administrations.

Underpinned by data which will identify where disparities exist, **equity plans** for state agencies must be drawn up to reduce disparate impacts. They must be re-visited periodically for progress updates and accountability.

In order to **diversify the state workforce**, hiring and promotion processes need to be made more equitable through concrete measures such as diverse hiring panels and reviews of applicant flow data by demographics.

All state employees should be required to undergo regular **training** to address cultural sensitivity and implicit bias, with **mentoring** available for practicing the application of lessons from training.

Policies, practices, and operations should be re-visited and analyzed using a **racial equity lens** to ensure that barriers to access for communities of color are eliminated, and new, inclusive policies are designed with equity in mind.

Throughout the process, **community engagement** is integral to including perspectives that are often missing in conversations surrounding racial disparities. These discussions help identify barriers and provide input into how things could be altered to achieve equity.

State services, communications, and outreach activities need to be **culturally and linguistically appropriate** in order to reach all communities.

Finally, to widen the scope of racial equity work and cement its presence throughout all of state government, agencies must ensure their **external partners are committed to addressing structural racism**.

"To evolve with society in a way that most effectively serves the local community, [courts] must be prepared not just to implement a set of changes today, but to create the right permanent structures and processes that will allow [the court] to sustain the attention and resources needed over time."¹³²

– Racial Justice Assessment Tool for Courts

Consistent and thorough application of the recommendations offered in this report require a significant shift in cultural, structural, and operational practices across the state. It is the hope that future coordinated efforts to uplift best practices and encourage cross-agency collaborations will be beneficial and foster a communal dedication to a "whole-of-government" approach. Connecticut has the opportunity to build on and further demonstrate its commitment to dismantling structural racism through implementing the recommendations in this report.

¹³² Although this quote refers to courts, the sentiment can be applied to all agencies seeking to make lasting change.

APPENDIX A

JB-CSSD Cultural Competency: 2023 Summary

The JB-CSSD Training Academy provided the following training sessions during 2023:

Foundations in Cultural Responsiveness 100: A total of nine (9) full day training cohorts were offered to Judicial Branch employees.

Ouch! Your Silence Hurts: A total of four (4) half day virtual training sessions were offered to JB-CSSD employees.

Identities in Transition: Considerations for Working with Immigrant Latinos in the US: A total of one (1) full day training session was offered to JB-CSSD employees.

Cultural Competency with Regards to Islam and Muslim: A total of three (3) half day virtual training session was offered to JB-CSSD employees.

Cross-Cultural Communication: A total of two (2) half day virtual sessions were offered to the offices of Juvenile Probation.

Working in a Diverse Workforce: A total of two (2) half day virtual training session was offered to JB-CSSD Employees.

The American Dream: A total of one (1) half day in-person training session was offered to JB employees.

Candid Conversations: A total of seven (7) half day virtual sessions were held for Juvenile Probation.

Understanding LGBTQ and the Gender Spectrum: A total of one (1) half day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

Understanding Neurodiverse Clients: A Look at the Autism Spectrum: A total of one (1) half day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

Autism and Criminal Justice: When the Two Worlds Collide: A total of three (3) half day virtual sessions was held for JB-CSSD employees.

Gender Specific Issues in Self-Harm: A total of one (1) full day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

Women's Gender Specific Issues: A total of one (1) full day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

Cultural Considerations when Working with Victims of Domestic Violence: A total of one (1) half day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

The Multicultural Workforce: A total of one (1) full day virtual session was held for JB-CSSD employees.

The Training Academy offers a total of four (4) web based on-demand training modules, and a total of three (3) cultural competency book reviews.

Cultural Competence: A Primer: One (1) hour training credit

Micro-Messages: One (1) hour training credit

Out of the Closet and Into a Box: Understanding Gender Identity with a Spotlight on Transgender: One (1) hour training credit

The Power of Privilege: One (1) hour training credit

White Fragility Book Review: One (1) hour training credit

Medicine Trail Book Review: One (1) hour training credit

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous Book Review: One (1) hour training credit

The following cultural events were recognized in 2023:

Year End Holiday Celebrations (virtual)

Title	Date	# of Attendees
Bodhi Day	12/8/2022	22
Hanukkah	12/19/2022	30
Christmas	12/22/2022	20
Kwanzaa	12/28/2022	26
Three Kings Day	1/6/2023	33
Pongal	1/17/2023	23
Lunar New Year	1/18/2023	55

Black History Month (virtual)

Title	Date	# of Attendees
Juneteenth	2/9/2023	113
Tell Them We Are Rising	2/16/2023	28

Women's History Month (virtual)

Title	Date	# of Attendees
Connecticut's Black, Indigenous and Women of Color	3/22/2023	137

In collaboration with the ACCC and the DEI Unit, the Training Academy assisted in the organization and execution of the 2023 Judicial Branch Diversity Week Program.

1. African Origin Legacy: Through the lens of the Amistad Uprising
2. Allyship is a Verb
3. Are We Listening? Connecting the Core Skill of Listening to Work-place Inclusion
4. Autism and Criminal Justice: When the Two Worlds Collide
5. Black Souls Rising: Caribbean Religions in Connecticut
6. Culture Matters
7. Cultural Considerations in the Context of Domestic Violence
8. Gender, Diversity, and Social Justice
9. Hearing Voices That Are Distressing
10. Introduction to Deaf Culture and the Community, Using Sign Language Interpreters in CT Courts
11. Islam and Muslims
12. Litchfield on Foot: The Life of William Grimes
13. Microaggressions: Why can they be so impactful if they are so small?
14. Race, Racism, and Human Trafficking
15. Real men cope: Tools to help men understand and manage pressures linked to toxic expressions of masculine gender identity
16. Religious Literacy: Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies for Under-standing and Engaging Religious Diversity
17. The American Dream
18. The Mohegan Tribe: Holding On and Moving Forward in our Homelands
19. The Prudence Crandall Museum presents: The History of the Canterbury School
20. Unfiltered Conversations on Race
21. Understanding Latin Culture
22. Unpacking White Privilege
23. Up Close: Sikhism, and Christianity
24. Working With LGBTQ+ Coworkers and Clients: What Judicial Staff Need to Know
25. Moderated Fireside Chat with Dr. Robert Livingston: Promoting Racial Equity in the Workplace and Society
26. Diversity Week Opening Ceremony

Introduction

The Health Equity* Impact worksheet was established in 2016 in order to assist DPH staff in analyzing the impact of CT legislative proposals from a health-equity perspective. Following is background information and guidance on each question in the worksheet.

Background

DPH first established its Health Equity Policy in 2012, and later revised it in 2016. The policy describes “health disparities” priority populations served in Connecticut as well as the ten essential services of DPH. All DPH staff should review this policy. It is available on the DPH Intranet under “Policies” at:

http://www.ct.gov/insidedph/lib/insidedph/ct_dph_policies_and_procedures/health_equity_policy_and_procedures.pdf

Worksheet Instructions

- **Identify the CGS Bill # and your Program in the upper left-hand corner.**
- **Question 1** – asks if this bill is meant to impact all CT residents, or not.
- **Question 2** – identifies the DPH health disparities priority populations. Does the bill under consideration impact any of the priority populations listed? For example, would it conceivably have an effect (positive **or** negative) on any groups listed? Oftentimes, smaller or hidden population groups are overlooked in examining impact of legislative proposals. If the answer is “yes,” please check all groups to which it applies.
- **Question 3** – identifies social, structural factors (aka “social determinants of health”) that may be affected by this legislation. The factors listed are examples of a broad range of social determinants that are closely linked to the public’s health. Ideally, good public policies will have a beneficial influence on a wide array of social factors. The list is not comprehensive of all social determinants, so please consider other possible factors that the legislation may influence and write them in under “Other, describe.”
- **Question 4** – asks if the proposal may be harmful or beneficial to the target population. Please answer all three items (a., b., c.,) under question 4. Please consult the list under question 3 in order to answer question 4.
- **Question 5** – please describe in your own words any potential positive or negative impacts this bill may have on health equity, that is, “the fair distribution of resources needed for health, fair access to the opportunities available, and fairness in the support offered to people when ill.”

After using this worksheet to evaluate equity in proposed legislation, please email a copy to [Daniel Aubin](#), [Jill Kennedy](#) and [Brie Wolf](#).

***Health Equity** refers to how uniformly services, opportunities and access are distributed across groups and places, according to the population group. Equity in health implies that ideally everyone can attain full health potential, and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstance.

Efforts to promote equity in health are therefore aimed at creating opportunities and removing barriers to achieving the health potential of all people. It involves the fair distribution of resources needed for health, fair access to the opportunities available, and fairness in the support offered to people when ill.

Health Equity Impact of Legislative Proposals Worksheet



BILL #: _____

PROGRAM RESPONDING: _____

1. Does this legislation impact all CT residents? Check one: Yes No

2. Which of the following priority populations does this legislation impact? Check all that apply (unless selecting “None of the above”).

<input type="checkbox"/> Racial/ethnic minority	<input type="checkbox"/> Incarcerated	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentally ill
<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless	<input type="checkbox"/> Immigrants/refugees	<input type="checkbox"/> Women
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth under 18	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual minority	<input type="checkbox"/> Underserved geographic area
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender group	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited English proficiency	<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans
<input type="checkbox"/> Low-income or education	<input type="checkbox"/> People with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Seniors
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above populations		

3. Which of the following social/structural factors does this legislation impact? Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Access to healthy food
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to safe, affordable housing
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to healthy indoor and outdoor places, such as homes, schools, parks, and playgrounds
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to quality medical care and/or social services
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to safe medical care and/or social services
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to medical/social services that are affordable and culturally appropriate
<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate language/communication services in medical care /social service settings
<input type="checkbox"/> Diverse pool of health and medical practitioners representative of the populations served
<input type="checkbox"/> Community economic development that supports local homes, businesses, buildings, and land
<input type="checkbox"/> Data collection on sociodemographic factors that influence health (e.g., race, language spoken)
<input type="checkbox"/> Early childhood development services and community supports
<input type="checkbox"/> Education that is high quality and culturally appropriate for all students
<input type="checkbox"/> Job training and jobs that provide all residents a livable income
<input type="checkbox"/> Law and justice system that provides equitable access and fair treatment for each person
<input type="checkbox"/> Policies to eliminate discriminatory practices that negatively affect the priority populations
<input type="checkbox"/> Public safety that includes fire, police, emergency medical services, and code enforcement
<input type="checkbox"/> Safe and supportive communities
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation that is safe, efficient, affordable, convenient, and reliable for everyone
<input type="checkbox"/> Underserved medical or health professional shortage areas
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe): _____

4. Would the proposed legislation improve, harm, or not consider the target population in relation to these factors? Check only one.

<input type="checkbox"/> Legislation may <u>improve</u> the target population’s relationship to one or more factors identified in #3
<input type="checkbox"/> Legislation may <u>harm</u> the target population’s relationship to one or more factors identified in #3
<input type="checkbox"/> Legislation <u>does not consider</u> the health impact of any social factors identified in #3 with the target population

5. In the following space, please describe the positive or negative impact(s) the bill may have on health equity.

