



# COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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## July 2024 Report to the Connecticut General Assembly’s Public Health and Appropriations Committees and to the Office of Policy and Management

### Commission Activities January 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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## Structural Racism Report: Launch and Related Activities

Pursuant to C.G.S. § 19a-133c, CREPH completed a structural racism report with recommendations on how to reduce race-based inequities in state government. The report offered practical steps to address structural racism sourced from practices currently being implemented in the federal government, Oregon (identified as a state leader through a national landscape analysis), and within certain Connecticut government agencies and branches. The [report](#), entitled *Dismantling Structural Racism within Connecticut State Government*, was released December 2023 and is available on the CREPH website.

To launch the report, CREPH and the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) partnered to organize a full-day symposium at the State Capitol on Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The symposium highlighted the recommendations from CREPH's *Dismantling Structural Racism* report and CHRO's *Equity Study*. The symposium, which was very well attended, included legislators and leaders in the Executive and Judicial branches of Connecticut state government. Keynote speakers included U.S. Office of Personnel Management **Director Kiran Ahuja**, Connecticut's **Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson**, and the then Department of Children and Families **Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes**.

Following the launch of the report, Associate Commission Analyst and lead author, Muna Abbas, has presented and held meetings with various state agencies, thought leaders, and experts in this field around the state and nationally. Abbas has continued to consult with Executive Branch agency leaders about how to implement the recommendations from the report within their respective structures and organizations.

## 2024 Legislative Session

As part of our charge and mission to make recommendations that decrease the effect of racism on public health, the commission was active in providing testimony and analysis during the 2024 Legislative Session.

### Dismantling Structural Racism in State Government:

In the 2024 legislative session, there were two bills which implemented some of the recommendations from the Commission's report, *Dismantling Structural Racism within Connecticut State Government*. Abbas, provided oral and written testimony on both bills ([SB 414](#) and [SB 433](#)) containing recommendations from the Commission's report. In a similar spirit, the Commission was pleased to see that the Governor announced in his [midterm budget proposal](#) his intention to hire a Chief Equity and Opportunity Officer for the state who would sit in the Office of the Governor.

Throughout legislative session, CREPH continued to work with legislators and partners in the Executive and Judicial branches to improve the proposal and explore options for implementation of the Commission's recommendations. Specifically, CREPH worked with the Office of the Governor (OTG) and legislative champions to develop language that would advance the Commission's recommendations through OTG's suggested infrastructure of an Officer who would oversee statewide government equity initiatives. This language was taken up in the form of an [amendment to SB 414](#), which was not called. SB 414 passed out of committee, but did not advance further in the 2024 legislative session. CREPH continues to work with partners in all three branches of state government to advance its recommendations.

Please find written testimony for SB 414 [here](#).

Please find written testimony for SB 433 [here](#).

## Association Health Plans/Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements/Employee Health Benefit Consortia:

Gretchen Shugarts, Commission Analyst, provided oral and [written](#) testimony on [HB 5247: An Act Concerning Employee Health Benefit Consortia](#). The Commission opposed the bill chiefly due to the adverse impact of medical underwriting on people of color. The use of medical underwriting or setting premium/participation rates based on health status is illegal in fully-insured health plans and would result in small groups deemed to have higher-than-average risk being charged higher insurance rates. Due to the race-based health inequities in Connecticut, this practice would disproportionately disadvantage groups of color.

## Other proposed bills CREPH testified on:

Additionally, Shugarts provided written testimony supporting each of the following:

- [SB 395: An Act Concerning the Reporting of Medical Debt](#) (click [here](#) for testimony)
- [HB 5320: An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance](#) (click [here](#) for testimony)
- [SB 425: An Act Prohibiting Discrimination by Health Care Providers in the Provision of Health Care Services in the State](#) (click [here](#) for testimony)

## Community Engagement & Strategic Planning

The Commission submitted a Request for Proposals (RFP) in July 2023 for a consultant to assist with the Commission's community engagement activities and strategic plan development. The RFP called for a community-based participatory research approach and the use of focus groups and surveys for identifying the specific systems changes Connecticut residents want to pursue so they may achieve better health. The findings will inform the Commission's priorities and policy recommendations in the form of a strategic plan.

The RFP Evaluation Committee members were Executive Director Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, CREPH analysts Muna Abbas and Gretchen Shugarts, and Director of Health Equity at Access Health CT/CREPH Community Engagement Advisor, Tammy Hendricks. The review committee scored all proposals and voted unanimously to select the University of Connecticut's Health Disparities Institute (HDI). The contract was executed in February 2024.

The team at HDI includes:

- **Linda Sprague Martinez, PhD** – *Primary Investigator and Contract Lead* – Director of HDI and Professor in the Departments of Medicine, Public Health Sciences, and School of Social Work.
- **Valen Diaz, MPH, MCHES** – *Project Director* – HDI's biostatistician and an Assistant Professor in Residence in the Department of Public Health Sciences.
- **Emil Coman, PhD** – *Biostatistician and Data Analyst* – HDI's biostatistician and an Assistant Professor-in-Residence in the Department of Public Health Sciences.
- **Trisha Pitter, M.S.** – *Community-Based Training Developer* – HDI's lead on community engagement and partnership building.

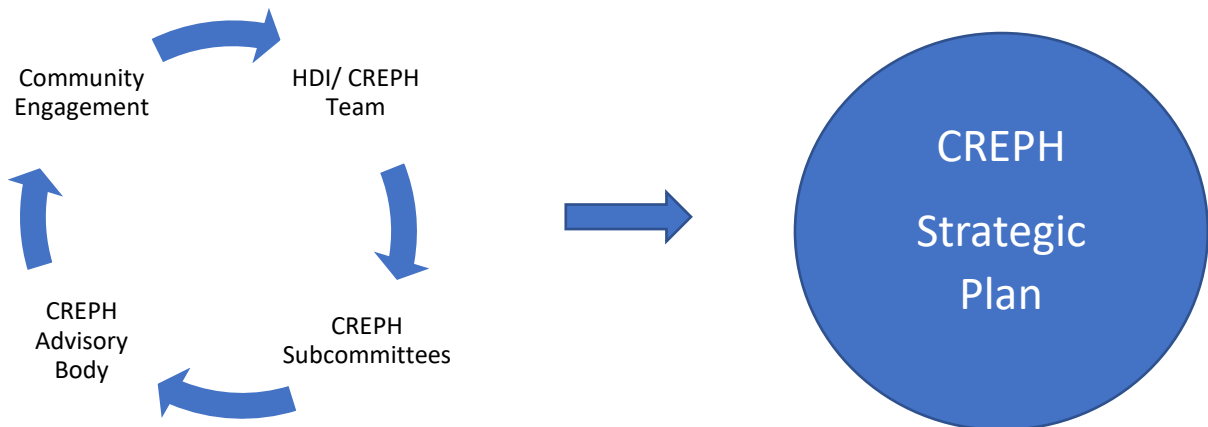
- **Peter Zapata, MPH, CHES - Research Assistant**
- **Community Engagement Advisors and Community Faculty** – Connecticut residents from across the state who will utilize their lived expertise to inform the research questions and methods. These team members are receiving on the job training in research methods and public health basics. There are nine (9) Community Engagement Advisors and five (5) Community Faculty with differing levels of experience in community-based work.

**Early-Stage Work, Preliminary Survey:**

Commission staff and HDI worked with Access Health CT to implement a short survey for dissemination at Access Health CT events. The goal of the survey was to collect residents' perspectives on their needs, key concerns, and stance on proposed solutions for addressing barriers to achieving health. The CREPH/HDI team expects the survey to serve as another source of data to inform the Commission's community engagement and strategic planning efforts.

**Subcommittees and Advisory Body Survey**

The CREPH and HDI team agreed that reengaging subcommittees would be useful to strategic planning. The goal is for the team to keep subcommittees abreast of the community engagement work thereby creating a continual feedback loop. The expectation is for community research findings to inform each subcommittee's policy conversations and development of solutions to ensure that CREPH's strategic plan is responsive to community priorities.



The Commission conducted a brief survey of Advisory Body members to gauge bandwidth for involvement in various activities in addition to collecting pertinent contact and demographic information. Survey responses were useful in reviving subcommittees and identifying potential subcommittee chairs.

The subcommittee membership will also consist of governmental and nongovernmental partners from diverse perspectives, professional roles, and lived expertise who will work together with advisory body

members to provide feedback and help develop the strategic plan. We anticipate subcommittee meetings will begin in the fall of 2024.

## Advisory Body Appointments

The present roster of appointed Advisory Body members is provided in the chart on the next page. The rows in yellow indicate appointments made in 2024. Vacancies are indicated in red text.

No.	Auth	Appointer	Qualifications in Statute	Appointee
1	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a health disparities expert affiliated with an academic research institution and shall serve as cochairperson	Vacant
2	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a representative of a violence intervention program using a health-based approach to examine individuals' post-incarceration and policies for integration	Jahad, Leonard
3	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a representative of a philanthropic entity that focuses on racial equity	Donelson, Tiffany
4	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	a representative of a nonprofit organization that focuses on health policy and racial equity issues and shall serve as cochairperson	Clarke, Ayesha
5	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	a representative of a nonprofit organization that focuses on racial equity and community engagement	Hamilton-Burgess, Chavon
6	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	an expert in immigration policy and law	Vacant
7	SMAJ	Duff, Bob	a representative of a nonprofit that focuses on equitable housing policy	Mirza, Faryal
8	SMAJ	Duff, Bob	a medical professional with expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion policy	Santos, Melissa
9	HMAJ	Rojas, Jason	a representative of a nonpartisan criminal justice policy and research entity	O'Rourke, Patricia
10	HMAJ	Rojas, Jason	a biostatistician or epidemiologist with knowledge of the effects of social-structural factors on health	Njoku, Anuli
11	SMIN	Harding, Stephen	a public health educator or researcher affiliated with an academic institution	Vacant
12	SMIN	Harding, Stephen	a current or former educator, school counselor or school nurse with public policy experience	Vacant
13	HMIN	Clarke, Ayesha <sup>1</sup>	an expert in environmental impacts on human health who is affiliated with an academic institution	Brugge, Douglas
14	HMIN	Candelora, Vincent J	a representative of a nonprofit that focuses on economic research and policy	Charmelus, Carline
15	BPRC CHR	Miller, Patricia Billie	an education policy researcher affiliated with an academic research institution	Cotto, Robert

<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Public Act No. 23-204 Sec. 197(b)(5) and Sec. 197 (d) Chairs may appoint qualified individuals after a 60-day vacancy period. This designation holds until a successor is appointed pursuant to PA 23-204 Sec. 197(b)(5).

## Commission Meetings

### February 1, 2024 – Regular Meeting

The Commission provided a review of the Dismantling Structural Racism in State Government Symposium and 2024 Legislative Session priorities. The Commission heard a presentation by Sabrina Corlette, Founder and Co-Director of the Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Previous meeting minutes and bylaws were adopted. The meeting agenda and minutes can be found [here](#). The CT-N recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

### June 6, 2024 – Regular Meeting

The Commission staff and Advisory Body shared updates from the 2024 Legislative Session. UConn's Health Disparities Institute staff gave a presentation about the strategic plan they are developing on behalf of the Commission using a community-based participatory research approach. The February 2024 minutes were adopted. The meeting [agenda](#) can be found on the CREPH website. Meeting minutes will be posted once approved by the Advisory Body at the next meeting. The CT-N recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

## 2024 Commission Meetings

Regular Commission meetings are scheduled for 10:00am-11:30am on the first Thursday of February, June, September, and December. Meetings can be held virtually, in-person, or hybrid. The location and mode of meetings is included in publicly posted meeting agendas, which can be found on the [CREPH website](#) or the [Public Meeting Calendar](#).

### Remaining 2024 meeting dates:

- September 5<sup>th</sup>
- December 5<sup>th</sup>

## Additional Commission Information

Commission Executive Director, Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, is due to go on maternity leave in early July and is due to return in early February 2025. While she is away, Commission staff, Muna Abbas and Gretchen Shugarts, will continue the Commission's work with the support of the Advisory Body.