



# COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Co-Chair: Ayesha Clarke, Executive Director, Health Equity Solutions

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## Full Commission Meeting

Thursday, March 13, 2025

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

**Hybrid Meeting**

**Members Present:** Co-Chair Ayesha Clarke (HES), Dr. Douglas Brugge (UConn Health), Carline Charmelus (PSC), Kevin Collins (CHF), Chavon Hamilton-Burgess (HHI), Barbara López (Make the Road), Dr. Faryal Mirza (UConn Health), Dr. Anuli Njoku (SCSU), Dr. Patricia O'Rourke (CT Appleseed Center), Dr. Anthony Santella (Fairfield University)

**Commission Staff Present:** Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, Muna Abbas, Gretchen Shugarts

**Members Absent:** Dr. Robert Cotto (Trinity College), Leonard Jahad (CVIP), Dr. Melissa Santos (CCMC)

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### Opening Remarks from the Co-Chair

Co-chair Clarke called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.

Commission is monitoring federal level happenings for potential state level impacts (i.e. Medicaid).

Welcome back to Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin.

### Roll Call

Gretchen Shugarts, Commission Analyst, called the roll. Quorum established.

### Meeting Minutes Approval

Changes to meeting minutes include place of employment/organization for Patricia O'Rourke. Motion to accept December 2024 minutes made by Anthony Santella and seconded by Kevin Collins.

Voice vote to approve amended December 2024 meeting minutes. No nays. Abstentions include Douglas Brugge. Minutes approved.

### Executive Director Report

- Announcement in December 2024 that Mariana Monteiro will serve as the Connecticut's Chief Equity & Opportunity Officer. Position was created by Governor's July Executive Order 24-2 which was a collaborative effort following CREPH's Dismantling Structural Racism in State Government Report and championed by the Governor's Office.

- Save the Date – Strategic Plan preview event in late May. Will have first completed strategic plan by July 1. The plan to be updated regularly so as to be useful to the General Assembly for advancing equity in Connecticut. Strategic Plan preview event will be held Wednesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>.

## 2025 Legislative Session Updates

*Muna Abbas*, Associate Commission Analyst

- Racial Ethnic Impact Statements (REIS)
  - Using state and national data, statements will provide an analysis of a bill and determine whether a bill is projected to either narrow or widen disparities.
  - Public Act 18-78 was passed, enabling REIS to be drafted as part of a bill but has yet to be implemented. The Commission has been assigned responsibility to conduct and implement REIS.
  - SB 1506, *An Act Concerning Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements*, is scheduled for a public hearing Monday, March 17<sup>th</sup>.
  - The Commission will be hiring two analysts to conduct REIS – a principal and junior analyst.
- Dr. Santella asked about expectations regarding volume of work for two new analysts. Abbas explained that REIS will not be conducted for all bills but there will be an agreed upon process between the Commission and legislators for conducting REIS.

*Gretchen Shugarts*, Commission Analyst

- Insurance-based Testimonies
  - SB 1192, *An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance*, seeks to address medical debt. Testimony already submitted. Supported concept of the bill and made recommendations to strengthen the bill.
  - SB 10, *An Act Concerning Health Insurance and Patient Protection*. Currently drafting testimony which will focus on stop loss policies and the risk segmentation that occurs in the fully-insured market as a result.
  - HB 7039, *An Act Concerning Health Insurance*. Will submit testimony. Bill seeks to put limits on retroactive denials of insurance claims (aka clawbacks).
  - HB 6589, *An Act Concerning Maternal Health*. Will likely submit testimony supporting the establishment of a report card for birth centers and hospitals

*Ayesha Clark*, Health Equity Solutions (HES) and Commission Co-Chair

- Shares some bills that HES is involved in that might be relevant to the Advisory Body members
  - SB 12, *An Act Concerning Connecticut's Housing Needs*
  - HB 5002, *An Act Concerning Housing and the Needs of Homeless Persons*
  - HB 6889, *An Act Concerning Evictions For Cause* – just cause
  - SB 740, *An Act Establishing a Refundable Tax Credit* – child tax credit
  - HB 5986, *An Act Establishing a Refundable Tax Credit Against the Personal Income Tax* – another child tax credit
  - SB 1217, *An Act Providing School Meals to All Students* – universal school meals
  - SB 1192, *An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance*
  - SB 1299, *An Act Concerning Medicaid-Covered Dental Care*
  - HB 6101, *An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage of Food as Medicine and Expanding Access to the Connecticut Farmers' Market/Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program*
  - HB 1394, *An Act Concerning the Provision of Health Care Services of Inmates in Correctional Institutions*

- HB 6870, *An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance*
- HB 6871, *An Act Limiting Out-of-Network Health Care Costs*
- SB 1366, *An Act Concerning Pharmacy Benefit Managers and Prescription Drug Rebate Reporting Requirement*
- SB 1469, *An Act Concerning Medical Debt*
- SB 1470, *An Act Concerning Twice Annual Reporting by the Department of Social Services on Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers*
- HB 6937, *An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage for Medically Necessary Children's Diapers*
- HB 7022, *An Act Promoting Equity in Medicaid Coverage for Fertility Health Care*
- SB Joint Resolution 35, *Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment Concerning Discrimination on the Basis of Sex Under the Equal Protection Clause*
- SB Joint Resolution 36, *Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment Concerning Environmental Rights*
- Chavon Hamilton-Burgess, Hartford Health Initiative (HHI)
  - Confirmed Clarke included Medicaid expansion
  - HB 7161, *An Act Concerning the Suspension of Motor Vehicle Operators' Licenses for Failure to Pay Fines or Failure to Appear for a Scheduled Court Appearance and Payment Installment Plans for Motor Vehicle Infractions and Violations*, which HHI is also supporting
- Barbara López, Make the Road (supporting the following:)
  - Husky-For-All
  - Medical Debt and Hospital Financial Assistance, SB 1192
  - Just Cause Evictions, HB 6889
  - Strengthening the TRUST Act, HB 7212
  - Connecticut Right to Vote

## **UConn Health Disparities Institute (HDI) Presentation**

*Valen Diaz*, Projects Director, and *Gillian Betz*, Research Associate

- Community-Based Participatory Research and Strategic Planning Process – Project Update
  - Based on conversations with subcommittee members, HDI drafted priorities and solutions that were responsive to Phase 1 findings
  - Subcommittee members finalized priority areas for Strategic Plan
  - Community Research Team prioritized solutions for Phase 2 assessment
  - Phase 2 assessment will consist of surveys and virtual focus groups/interviews with key informants (currently in progress)
  - Timeline
    - March 2025: Collect and analyze data
    - April 2025: Present findings and revised solutions; determine solutions in final subcommittee meeting with all subcommittees
    - May 2025: Finalize solutions; preview strategic plan
    - June 2025: Finalize and release strategic plan; plan for dissemination
  - Phase 1 assessment reports – available on Commission website and shared back with all respondents/participants

*Chavon Hamilton-Burgess*, Hartford Health Initiative

- When does the survey close? Valen stated end of March or beginning of April.

*Patricia O'Rourke*, Connecticut Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

- Question regarding context for Criminal Justice expertise in focus groups
- Gillian will follow-up via email

*Doug Brugge*, UConn Health

- Since the survey was translated into 9 languages, Brugge asked about outreach for obtaining meaningful sample. Per Valen:
  - The Community Research Team has been generating a far-reaching list of contacts to share the survey with
  - Have asked all subcommittee members to assist with distribution

*Anthony Santella*, Fairfield University

- Question regarding data collection. What's the goal for obtaining a representative sample and can timeline be adjusted?
  - Valen stated there will be limitations.
    - Timeline has very limited flexibility.
    - Stressed transparency regarding limitations of the assessment.

*Faryal Mirza*, UConn Health

- Has survey been distributed via UConn's broadcast email within UConn Health system? Valen stated they have not yet shared with the UConn Health Lifeline but is something they could do.

*Doug Brugge*, UConn Health

- Appreciated Santella's point about sample. The goal is not a representative sample. Brugge wonders about framing: The outreach aim is a targeted effort to get responses from those that are mostly adversely affected by disparities in state. Helps to justify the sampling strategy since that is the population that is most important to survey.

More questions and discussion followed from Charmelus, Charmchi Goodwin, Mirza, and Clarke.

#### **Public Comments**

- None

#### **Good of the Order**

- Co-chair Clarke shared first week of April, Health Equity Solutions is hosting a health equity week. Invitation for in-person and virtual events.
- O'Rourke shared that during the meeting she received an update on SB 1394, *An Act Concerning the Provision of Health Care Services of Inmates in Correctional Institutions*. The bill has received a Joint Favorable Substitute report and will be forwarded to the Senate Calendar.
- Charmelus wanted to share that the Partnership for Strong Communities is supporting HB 6831 and couple of others. Also, next Friday, they will be conducting an intersectional webinar regarding engaging faith-based communities.

#### **Adjournment**

Co-chair Clarke clarified that once the agenda is done, a motion to conclude is not necessary. She thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the March meeting. Clarke also thanked Abbas & Shugarts for filling the gap during Charmchi Goodwin's absence. The meeting was adjourned at 10:57 am.