



COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

Full Commission Meeting

Thursday, June 12, 2025

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present: Co-Chair Ayesha R. Clarke (HES), Dr. Douglas Brugge (UConn Health), Carline Charmelus (PSC), 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), Dr. Melissa Santos (CCMC)

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

Members Absent: Dr. Robert Cotto (Trinity College), Leonard Jahad (CVIP), Kevin Collins (CHF)

Opening Remarks from the Co-Chair

Co-chair Clarke called the meeting to order at 10:02 am.

Co-chair Clarke congratulated attendees on reaching the end of legislative session.

Roll Call

Muna Abbas, Associate Commission Analyst, called the roll. Quorum established.

Meeting Minutes Approval

Changes to meeting minutes to reflect friendly amendments. Motion to accept March 2025 minutes made by Carline Charmelus and seconded by Patricia O'Rourke. Minutes approved.

Strategic Planning Update

Valen Diaz, Projects Director, UConn Health Disparities Institute (UConn HDI)

- Diaz gave an update on the phase 2 survey of Connecticut residents with the goal to assess feasibility and sustainability of proposed solutions.
- Community Research Team, subcommittees and Commission staff then chose final solutions for strategic plan alongside a dissemination plan.
- Diaz highlighted the strategic planning preview event held on May 21 at the State Capitol with the media coverage it received.
- Diaz shared reflections about the project regarding statewide engagement which led to the final nine solutions and gave suggestions for next steps for implementation and monitoring of the

- plan.
- The strategic plan will be released at the end of June.

Co-Chair Clarke asked about potential unintended consequences the advisory body should be aware of. Linda Sprague Martinez, Director of UConn HDI mentioned that the Commission should focus on monitoring and implementation of the plan, particularly raising awareness among the community.

Tina Loarte-Rodriguez DNP, RN, CPPS, CPHRM asked a question about intentionality making sure audience is reflective of the state population and engagement of the youth in particular. Diaz shared how the project tried to reach diverse populations in the state for surveys and focus groups. Sprague Martinez reflected how the Community Research Team was formed with the intention to reach those with lived experience; however, the project wasn't able to reach many of the youth population but will try to in the dissemination. Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin also shared how the Commission Advisory Body and subcommittees are diverse in terms of experience, race, ethnicity, and sector, but welcomed suggestions for reaching further communities including the youth.

2025 Legislative Session Updates

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, Executive Director

- Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin gave an update on the bipartisan passage of PA 25-27 (SB 1506) regarding changes to the statute on racial ethnic impact statements (REIS) statute to assist in the Commission's operationalization of the statements. The bill makes changes regarding how the statements are published publicly, the timeline of statements, the procedures and timelines for the requests and access to information from state agencies. The Commission is currently hiring for two analysts to work on REIS. In the fall, the Commission will be working with legislative caucuses and nonpartisan staff to produce draft guidelines and mock statements.
- Charmchi Goodwin then shared information on other bills that match the key priority areas that came out of the community-based participatory research process.
 - Childcare affordability and accessibility. This was a priority for the legislature and Governor this year. The goal was to pay for childcare but also expand availability of childcare, particularly in childcare deserts.
 - SB 1 (PA 25-93) – established the early childhood education endowment
 - HB 5003 (PA 25-82)
 - Office of Early Childcare (OEC) to implement prospective payment system for Care 4 Kids
 - Requires OEC to establish and maintain an electronic portal that will provide information on availability of spots and allow for enrollment in early childcare programs
 - Increases maximum number of children served by licensed home-based childcare programs to 12 (up from nine) which helps to increase access
 - Healthcare affordability and medical debt
 - SB 10 (PA 25-94), An Act Concerning Health Insurance and Patient Protection – Incorporated important provisions for expanding healthcare access

- Original bill language sought to address mental health parity by limiting restrictions for mental health services, requiring parity reports from insurance companies, and allowing CID to fine insurers for noncompliance. The bill also sought to shift burden of proof from health care providers for prior authorizations, addressed step therapy, allowed CID to use affordability in rate review hearings and reduce requested rate increases by up to 2% for insurers who exceeded cost-growth benchmarks for two prior years, and regulated stop loss insurance policies which are problematic given their underwriting component.
 - While legislation ultimately passed, burden of proof requirement, affordability factor in rate review hearings, and stop loss components were removed from the amended bill.
- SB 7, An Act Concerning Protections for Access to Health Care and the Equitable Delivery of Health Care Services in the State – Public health omnibus bill
- Reproductive health care provision including trigger language to safeguard EMTALA, creating a "Safe Harbor" account to pay for expenses related to people out of state seeking access to reproductive and gender affirming care, and protections for physicians providing reproductive or gender affirming care. Codified fluoride in drinking water. Bill had previously contained language on safe consumption sites to combat drug overdose deaths but was removed by the House.
 - Although the bill died, portions of it passed in the budget and implementer.
- Other bills that did not pass in bills but were put into the budget and implementer were hospital financial assistance and a maternal health report card.
- HB 5002, An Act Concerning Housing and the Needs of Homeless Persons
- Zoning – regional housing needs are to be analyzed and each town is assigned a number of units to develop. Similar to Fair Share housing policy methodology. The bill allows developers to convert commercial buildings to residential with nine or fewer units without having to go before local Planning & Zoning Commissions. Also eliminates minimum off-street parking requirement, prevents towns from using "hostile architecture" (i.e. spiked surfaces), and expanded number of fair rent commissions to include towns with populations of 15k or more.
 - Governor has requested changes to this bill. The bill passed the House and Senate but has not been signed by the Governor.

Ayesha R. Clarke, Co-Chair

- Hospital Financial Assistance – any program administered by hospitals that help reduce costs of care
 - Office of Healthcare Advocate (OHA) will contract with a vendor to develop a portal which will serve as a navigation tool to assist patients and families identify and apply for financial assistance with Connecticut hospitals

- OHA web site will also have information available on the state's medical debt erasure initiative (Undue Medical Debt)

Carline Charmelus, Housing, Environment & Communities Subcommittee Chair

- HB 5002 – represents a critical step forward to create a more affordable, equitable, and stable housing future for all residents
 - Comprehensive housing and zoning reform bill expands rental assistance, supports middle housing and transit-oriented development, and helps limit exclusionary local practices and invests in fair housing enforcement and infrastructure.
 - All of the topics above came up in subcommittee discussions concerning the Commission's strategic plan.
 - The bill still has not been signed by the Governor and there is still room for advocacy for the bill.

Public Comments

- None

Good of the Order

- Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin wished everyone a wonderful summer, and we will be reaching out with next steps regarding the strategic plan publication and dissemination information.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Carline Charmelus, and seconded by Patricia O'Rourke.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:03 am.