



COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

Co-Chair: Kristina Talbert-Slagle, Assistant Professor of Global Health, Middlebury College (Vermont)

Full Commission Meeting

Thursday, June 11, 2026

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present: Co-Chairs Ayesha R. Clarke (HES) & Kristina Talbert-Slagle (Middlebury College), Dr. Douglas Brugge (UConn Health), Carline Charmelus (PSC), Kevin Collins (CHF), Chavon Hamilton-Burgess (HHI), Dr. Faryal Mirza (UConn Health), Dr. Patricia O'Rourke (CT Appleseed Center)

Commission Staff Present: Muna Abbas, Gretchen Shugarts, Stephanie Costanza (aka Stephanie Gendron)

Members Absent: Dr. Robert Cotto (Trinity College), Leonard Jahad (CVIP), Dr. Anuli Njoku (SCSU), Dr. Anthony Santella (Fairfield University), Dr. Melissa Santos (CCMC)

Opening Remarks

- **Co-Chair Clarke** – called the meeting to order at 10:09am

Roll Call

Gretchen Shugarts, *Commission Analyst*, called the roll. Quorum established shortly after the roll call.

Legislative Updates

Muna Abbas, *Acting Executive Director*

Busy legislative session testifying both in-person and in writing. Many of the bills the commission testified on related to the Commission's strategic plan.

- **SB 265: An Act Concerning Additional Funding for the Care 4 Kids Program and Certain Child Care Providers** – Commission testified in support of the bill. While this bill did not pass as an individual bill, the final budget passed saw an additional \$320 million dollars put into the endowment fund.
- **SB 266: An Act Limiting the Access of Private Equity to Funds from the Early Childhood Education Endowment** – In Support
- **SB 3: An Act Concerning Health Care Affordability** – In support of this session's flagship affordability plan addressing healthcare – Portions of this bill were passed in the budget
 - Basic Health Program was passed in the budget (sections 454-455) - DSS will develop and submit the Blueprint Application if Covered Connecticut is not renewed by July 2027.

- Connecticut Option study – \$1 million allocated to OPM to conduct the study. Interim report due by January 2027 and final report in January 2028.
- Commission actively working with legislative, executive branch, and external partners to address healthcare coverage and affordability through dedicated workgroup.

Gretchen Shugarts, Commission Analyst

- SB 401: *An Act Concerning a Bridge Program to Allow Access to Food, Housing and Health Care Benefits* – In support. Bill passed the Senate but was never called in the House.
- HB 5169: *An Act Requiring the Establishment of An Alert in the Statewide Health Information Exchange Regarding Patients with a History of Violence of Combative Behavior Toward a Healthcare Provider* – In support. Bill successfully reported out of the Public Health Committee but was never called in either chamber.
- HB 5378: *An Act Concerning Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements & Requiring a Study of the Feasibility of Establishing the Connecticut Option Program* – In Opposition. Bill passed out of the Insurance Committee, was then referred by the House to Appropriations where it died.
- HB 5127: *An Act Concerning Medical Credit Cards* – In Support. Bill passed and PA 26-6 was signed into law by the Governor on May 7th.

Meeting Minutes Approval

Co-chair Talbert-Slagle called for a motion to accept March 2026 minutes which was made by Kevin Collins and seconded by Chavon Hamilton Burgess. No discussion, nays, or abstentions. Minutes approved.

Racial Ethnic Impact Statement Updates

Muna Abbas, Acting Executive Director

- REIS was piloted this session.
- REIS informational tool for legislators to examine projected impacts by race and ethnicity.
- REIS – two analysts – Stephanie Costanzi and current search for a second analyst as Nancy moved on to academia. Currently hiring for a lead analyst with the posting closing on June 21st. Hoping to have this person by early fall as the Commission plans for the formal REIS rollout during the 2027 legislative session.

Stephanie Costanzi, Commission Analyst

- **Overview of REIS Pilot**
 - Received five requests for REIS requests and one additional request for a supplemental analysis
 - SB 5 – large AI bill. REIS examined AI in employment-related decisions
 - SB 6 – would have established a child tax credit. The supplemental analysis examined impact of child tax credit on minority-owned businesses.
 - HB 5109 – would have changed how cannabis taxes in the state are levied.
 - HB 5347 – would have required some stage agencies to translate forms into languages other than English.

- SB 4 – large omnibus bill mostly dealing with consumer bills. Ultimately, the REIS request was withdrawn by the requesting legislator so the team did not produce a REIS on this bill.
- **Data used for REIS** – Used mostly publicly available data from federal and state agencies and some external, non-government sources. In addition, the Commission reached out to some state agencies for data who were very responsive. Commission appreciates the responsiveness given the compressed timelines REIS operates within.
- **Evaluation of Procedures** – at conclusion of session, the Commission evaluated procedures and found the timelines appropriate for REIS delivery.
 - No large-scale changes.
 - Legislators can only request a REIS within ten days of a bill being voted out of committee. However, many legislators submitted requests prior to that happening which was helpful as it allowed for the REIS team to engage in preliminary research and data analysis.
 - When data was needed from a state agency, legislative liaisons were a helpful point of contact.
 - When a bill addresses several topics, it will be necessary to get clarity early on as to the topic(s) the legislator is interested in having analyzed.
 - Flexibility and tracking of legislation will be essential.
- **Next steps**
 - Hiring of lead REIS analyst
 - Building a data library – a centralized location of data sources (including federal and state agencies, and nongovernmental sources)
 - Writing practice REIS
 - Finalizing REIS procedures. The Commission will draft a report that will be submitted to legislative leadership for inclusion into the joint rules.
- **Q&A**
 - **Co-chair Clarke** asked about *factors considered when deciding on whether to conduct a REIS*. Costanzi explained that when a request is received, a feasibility assessment is conducted which explores the following:
 - Is there a racial/ethnic lens that can be applied to the bill?
 - Is there a disparate impact by race/ethnicity?
 - Is there data available? If there is no data, then the REIS is deemed not feasible.
 - Does the REIS team have the bandwidth?
 - **Co-chair Clarke** asked *what legislators do with the REIS after the analysis is complete*. Costanzi explained that the goal is for REIS to assist legislators in their decision-making as well as for them to use the information contained in the REIS in their floor debates. Abbas added that moving forward, REIS will be available on the bill page for the public to access.
 - **Co-chair Talbert Slagle** – Praised Muna for stepping into the Acting ED role with a high level of professionalism. Thanked Muna and the team for doing this important work that is impactful and innovative, and for setting an example across the country.

Modeling Workgroup Update

Acting ED Abbas

- Healthcare modeling update
 - Last fall, the Commission convened a healthcare workgroup to look at addressing federal changes and brainstorm long-term and sustainable solutions to health insurance coverage and affordability
 - Funding provided by The Connecticut Project and Connecticut Health Foundation to Urban Institute to engage in modeling for the state to consider. Urban Institute will be using simulations with a focus on cost to both the state and individuals.
 - In Spring, Urban completed preliminary modeling done on Basic Health Program (BHP).
 - Over the summer, Urban will publish a landscape analysis on what other states are doing.
 - Anticipate having the full report with three options modeled by the Fall.
 - In the budget, \$1 million was allocated to OPM to conduct a similar study. The Commission is hopeful OPM's work will be aligned with, but not duplicative, of the modeling Urban is currently engaged in.

Strategic Plan Update

Katia Ruesta-Daley, Research Assistant at Health Disparities Institute (HDI)

- Updates regarding the **Strategic Plan Dissemination** – Dissemination partners include Community Dissemination Champions, Health Equity Solutions, and Indelible Impressions.
 - Currently developing a **toolkit** which is expected to be finalized by the end of June.
 - **Lunch and Learn** with approximately 30 participants – speakers were Gretchen Shugarts, Dr. Linda Sprague Martinez, and Ruesta-Daley where they discussed the Strategic Plan and work the Commission was engaged in this legislative session.
 - Hosted **Leadership Roundtable** – Discussion of rising costs from housing, healthcare, childcare leading to affordability challenges and intersect with racial inequities. Had approximately 50 people in attendance.
 - Final event, **Community Forum** at the Village for Families – where Co-chair Clarke presented on the Commission's strategic plan. Over 100 people in attendance and feedback included appreciation for learning about the work happening in the state.
- **Next steps**
 - Finalizing an upcoming community forum
 - Releasing op-eds over summer with Community Dissemination Champions
- **Q&A**
 - **Hamilton Burgess** asked if the community members that were engaged in the creation of the strategic plan will also be part of the dissemination. Ruesta-Daley clarified that the Community Dissemination Champions are community members that were involved in the creation of the plan and are currently involved in co-creating and messaging throughout the entire dissemination process.
 - **Co-chair Clarke** asked Advisory Body members to reach out if anyone has thoughts/ideas regarding where to share information relating to the strategic plan. Specifically, if anyone knows of any events where the dissemination team can attend and engage with community members, please reach out.

Executive Director Hiring Process

Co-Chair Clarke

- Posting **will close tomorrow at 5pm** and asked that folks circulate the job description.
- Looking for someone who is passionate about racial equity and public health. Need someone who is committed and ready to continue this work in January 2027.
- **Brugge** – someone asked him to write a letter of recommendation and he wanted to know if serving on the Commission is a conflict of interest? Muna will check with HR and let him know via email.

Public Comments

- **Kimberly Haugabook** of Carelon Behavior Health had a question about REIS being available to the public. Muna clarified that pilot REIS will not be available but moving forward, all REIS will be available to the public.
- Advisory Body Member, Patricia O'Rourke, invited CT Appleseed summer intern to give some remarks.

Savannah Fulton was a former Hartford Public School magnet school graduate with a social justice focus. Her senior project focused on maternal mortality among African-American women. She chose this topic because her sister was a victim of medical neglect. The internship with CT Appleseed has given her a platform to continue to engage with the topic. She finds it inspiring to see groups working to promote health equity for all communities. She is grateful to be with us and for the work that we are doing. Co-chair Clarke thanked her for joining us and for sharing her story.

Good of the Order

- Clarke emphasized that we have lead analyst role for REIS due by June 21st. Please pass that along, in addition to sharing the ED role.
- If there's anything happening, please share so we can circulate.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am.