

Info Sheet: Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

The goal: Compel Governor Ned Lamont to publically declare racism a public health crisis in the state of Connecticut.

What can you do? Join with hundreds of members in the faith-based community in urging our legislators to pass clean slate legislation. Write letters, join meetings with legislators, and make phone calls to help legislators understand the importance of declaring racism a public health crisis.

Why? Due to race-based denied opportunities and discrimination in housing, employment, education, food, health care, law and civil rights, health outcomes for Black and Hispanic people are much bleaker than their White counterparts. For example, **nationwide, Black people are dying of COVID-19 at 2.3 times the rate of white people** according to the [COVID Racial Data Tracker](#).

To declare racism as a public health crisis is an important first step in the movement to advance racial equity and justice according to the [American Public Health Association](#). It also sets the ground for subsequent allocation of resources and strategic action.

How? On June 15, 2020, Rev. AJ Johnson, pastor of Urban Hope Refuge Church, sent an [11 page document](#) to Governor Lamont urging him to take swift action to address racism as a public health crisis and “acknowledge the mental and physical harm that systemic racism has had on black and brown people and take immediate action to dismantle harmful structures.” The document outlined needs and proposed solutions in the following areas:

- Infrastructure
- Healthcare
- Public safety
- Criminal justice reform
- Housing
- Education

Contributors included professionals from the YWCA Hartford Region, Open Communities Alliance, Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund, Yale Law School, Black Leaders and Administrators Consortium, Inc. and more.

To date, there has been no response from the Governor.

Has this been done before? Yes! Local and state leaders have declared racism a public health crisis/emergency in over 20 states. In Connecticut, 16 cities/counties have made the declaration. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Info Sheet: Passing Clean Slate Legislation

The goal: To get legislators to pass “Clean Slate” legislation in partnership with Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONNECT).

What can you do? Join with hundreds of members in the faith-based community in urging our legislators to pass clean slate legislation. Write letters, join meetings with legislators, and make phone calls to help legislators understand the importance of passing clean slate legislation.

Why? *Clean Slate legislation would empower Connecticut to expunge qualifying criminal records for people who remain crime-free for three years for most misdemeanors and five years for low-level felonies.* Clean Slate helps people get the second chance they’ve earned by streamlining petition-based record-clearing — a costly and time-sensitive process that prevents the vast majority of eligible people from ever obtaining needed relief.

Nearly 9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 5 colleges now use background checks, denying formerly incarcerated people the opportunity to support themselves and their families.

Clean Slate impacts approximately 5,000 Connecticut residents who complete their prison sentences and are released from prison each year. Too often, their criminal records is a barrier to moving forward with their lives.

Click [here](#) to see a Fact Sheet put together by CONNECT showing how **Clean Slate is not only a racial justice issue, but also improves public safety and boosts the economy!**

How? GHIAA is collaborating with CONNECT and others to prepare legislation for the next legislative session in January 2021. Click to learn about [SB403](#).

Has this been done before? Yes! At the state level, Pennsylvania, Utah, and California have all passed Clean Slate legislation with wide bi-partisan support.

A 2019 Michigan [study](#) found that citizens who had their records expunged saw a 25% increase in salary after just two years! Those salaries, earned on the legal marketplace, mean that they can secure basic goods, support their families, and contribute tax dollars to society.

If not for mass incarceration and the collateral consequences of a criminal record, the U.S. poverty rate could have dropped a full 20% between 1980 and 2004.

Info Sheet: Repealing Welfare Liens in Connecticut

The goal: To compel legislators to repeal welfare liens in the State of Connecticut.

What can you do? Join with hundreds of members in the faith-based community in urging our legislators to pass clean slate legislation. Write letters, join meetings with legislators, and make phone calls to help legislators understand the importance of repealing welfare liens.

Why? Connecticut is one of only two states that continue to practice welfare liens. ***A welfare lien is a lien that the state places on a welfare recipient's assets, demanding repayment when the person sells or refinances a home, receives a legal settlement (e.g. for personal injury), receives any inheritance, or dies and attempts to leave inheritance to their heirs.***

These liens treat welfare assistance as a loan saddled on the backs of recipients. These loans essentially keep recipients and their families trapped in cycles of debt and poverty.

How? GHIAA leaders and organizers worked with Matt Ritter, House Majority Leader, on a draft [Bill CTHB05310](#) to repeal Connecticut's current statute.

As compelling as the need to end welfare liens is, repeal will NOT be easy. Skeptics cite the loss of millions of dollars in revenue to the State. Rep. Ritter and his team is currently working on the fiscal note; however, to NOT repeal welfare liens is costly in perpetuating entrenched poverty and the accompanying social ills.

However, we cannot balance the budget of a wealthy state on the backs of the most impoverished amongst us! This is morally and ethically reprehensible.

Has this been done before? Yes! A 1973 national study noted that over 30 states had this kind of provision in their law at that time. The study concluded (almost 50 years ago!) that the policy was outmoded. It stated: "As the Nixon administration has recommended, Congress should prohibit all recovery in the federally funded cash assistance programs; the states also should repeal the requirement in General Assistance."

Our state can and MUST do better to give its residents who receive welfare assistance a true opportunity to make their way out of poverty and off assistance altogether.