



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting Proposed House Bill 5614, An Act
Establishing a Commission to Study the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Senator Hartley, Representative Cohen, Ranking Members Martin and Buckbee, and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of Proposed House Bill 5614, An Act Establishing a Commission to Study the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We encourage the committee to support Proposed House Bill 5614. While we have only been able to review the bill's proposed concept, we believe that the concept set forth in Proposed House Bill 5614 is strong enough to merit support even without exact language.

Systemic inequalities in healthcare, employment, and state and federal pandemic responses have made marginalized people more vulnerable to death and harm from COVID-19. It is widely acknowledged that COVID-19 has been more lethal to Black and brown people in the U.S. than to white people.¹ COVID-19 has also been more likely to infect people of color than white people,² and possibly more likely to cause long-term health impacts among patients of color.³ In addition, lower-income people

¹ "Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Nov. 30, 2020, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.

² Excluding people of Asian ethnicity. *Id.*

³ See Carmen Nesbitt & Liz Essley Whyte, "For some COVID patients, pre-existing conditions and long-term consequences part of the struggle." Center for Public Integrity, Jan. 31, 2021, available at <https://publicintegrity.org/health/coronavirus-and-inequality/pre-existing-conditions-long-term-consequences-covid-patients/>.

are more adversely affected by COVID-19 than relatively higher-income people.⁴ Immigration status also matters. Non-citizen U.S. residents fare worse than U.S. citizens,⁵ with undocumented people having particular vulnerabilities that may make their outcomes worse.⁶ Some evidence also shows that trans people are more likely to be impacted by COVID-19 than cisgender people.⁷ In short, the most marginalized people in society are disproportionately harmed by COVID-19, and these harms are due to and compounded by existing disparities in the systems that our communities rely on to be healthy.

Because of the disparities in who has been made most vulnerable to COVID-19, this study is crucial. We urge the Committee to study other forms of marginalization as well, though. For example, at some points during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Connecticut Department of Correction had a worse infection rate than any town in Connecticut.⁸ The practices of the Department of Correction and the state of Connecticut as a whole likely worsened outcomes for incarcerated people.⁹ That impact deserves to be studied and understood so that the state can ensure it never again fails people in its custody so badly. Other people in congregate living facilities, including people with disabilities and older people, were similarly impacted; the state's role in their exposure merits further study. Unhoused people were also disproportionately affected by COVID-19,¹⁰ so the state's role in

⁴ B. Rose Huber, "COVID-19 shutdowns disproportionately affected low-income [B]lack households." *Science Daily*, Nov. 30, 2020, *available at* <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/11/201130150355.htm>. Low income Black households are disproportionately affected relative to other low-income households. *Id.*

⁵ Clark et al., "Disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrant communities in the United States." *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, Jul. 13, 2020, *available at* <https://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371/journal.pntd.0008484>.

⁶ *See, e.g.*, Irene Bloemraad & Jasmijn Slootjes, "COVID-19 is blind to legal status, but can disproportionately hurt immigrants." *Berkeley Research Streams*, Apr. 21, 2020, *available at* <https://matrix.berkeley.edu/research/covid-19-blind-legal-status-can-disproportionately-hurt-immigrants>.

⁷ *See* Poteat et al., "COVID-19 vulnerability of transgender women with and without HIV infection in the eastern and southern U.S." *J. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, Jul. 24, 2020, *available at* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7386532/>.

⁸ <https://www.acluct.org/en/news/if-ct-prisons-and-jails-were-town-theyd-have-highest-covid-19-infection-rate-state>

⁹ <https://www.acluct.org/en/news/connecticut-agencies-have-lot-independent-authority-protect-public-health-releasing>

¹⁰ *See, e.g.*, Molly Bohannon et al., "COVID-19: The 'crisis within a crisis' for homeless people." *USA Today*, Aug. 28, 2020, *available at* <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2020/08/28/covid-19-invisible-victims-homeless-people/5636938002/>.

worsening or improving their outcomes should also be included in this study. Finally, women have been disproportionately financially harmed by COVID-19 and that effect must be studied as well.¹¹

Understanding how and why COVID-19 disproportionately harmed and killed people of color, low-income people, immigrants, incarcerated people, disabled people, people experiencing homelessness, and women is a key part of both accountability and improving outcomes for vulnerable people in future pandemics. This study is a great starting point, but it must include many intersectional points of vulnerability to give a true picture of Connecticut's successes and failures. Accordingly, we ask the Committee to support Proposed House Bill 5614 and to make it even stronger by also studying the state's role in exacerbating disparities due to systemic inequality for people in congregate living situations, including Connecticut prisons and jails, people who are homeless, and women.

¹¹ See, e.g., Nicole Bateman & Martha Ross, "Why has COVID-19 been especially harmful for working women." Brookings Inst., Oct. 2020, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>; see also Kate Farrar, "Stay home when sick' is out of reach for women." CT Mirror, Mar. 12, 2020, available at <https://ctmirror.org/category/ct-viewpoints/stay-home-sick-out-of-reach-for-women-kate-farrar/>.