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**Testimony
Regarding
Raised Bill No. 859 An Act Concerning Community Health Workers**

Public Health Committee
March 25, 2019

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Lesser, Senator Anwar, Representative Young, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

On behalf of Health Equity Solutions, I am pleased to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 859. Health Equity Solutions (HES) is a non-profit organization in Connecticut focused on advancing health equity in the state through educational awareness and advocacy. Our mission is to promote policies, programs, and practices that result in every Connecticut resident experiencing equitable health care access, delivery, and outcomes regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

HES strongly supports the full recognition and integration of Community Health Workers (CHWs) and support pathways to sustainable funding for their work. CHWs extend beyond the traditional four walls of health care institutions and work within communities to improve health and health outcomes. In 2017, Public Law 17-74 created the first statutory definition of CHWs, providing valuable recognition for their work. The statute defines CHWs as a “public health outreach professional with an in-depth understanding of the experience, language, culture, and socioeconomic need of the community.” The statute goes on to describe CHWs as trusted liaisons between the community and health care and social services providers.

CHWs are effective in achieving the triple aim - better overall health, improving quality and the overall patient experience, and reducing costs – while reducing health disparities. CHWs should be an integral part of the health care team, but all too often they are only employed when grant funds are available to support the work. Once the grant disappears, so does the CHW and the potential for greater health improvement in communities and individuals. To support full recognition, better funding, and more integration of CHWs, we offer support of a certification program for these workers.

According to the Association of State Territorial and Health Officials (ASTHO), 15 states either have a CHW training/certification program or laws/regulations establishing a CHW certification program; three additional states have statutes that create a CHW advisory board, taskforce, or workgroup to establish program requirements.¹ In many of those states, certification has been linked to payment and better integration/utilization of CHWs.

The October 2018 Report to the Legislature on Community Health Workers, completed as a result of PL 17-74, provides detailed recommendations for creating a CHW certification program in Connecticut. The report was completed over the course of a year and involved detailed research of the various certification models, expertise and experience of CHWs, employers, and the CT Department of Public Health. In sum, the report thoroughly examined best practices and lessons learned from others in recommending the best pathway for Connecticut.

HES believes it is critical to move forward with a certification program in Connecticut; one that is operated by the Department of Public Health but informed by the great work of the CHW Advisory Committee. To do this, we urge the Public Health Committee support SB 859. We believe there has been substantial evidence, research and work product produced on CHWs and respectfully submit that it is time to create a certification of CHWs in Connecticut. Given this position, we would encourage building the certification program based on the recommendations outlined in the October 2018 Report to the Legislature.

I thank you for our time and consideration of this important public health and health equity matter.

Respectfully submitted,
Tekisha Dwan Everette, PhD
Executive Director

¹ Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, *State Community Health Worker Association Standards Map*, retrieved February 6, 2017, <http://www.astho.org/Public-Policy/Public-Health-Law/Scope-of-Practice/CHW-Certification-Standards-Map/>.