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Oppose HB392

Good morning, Chairperson MacDonald and members of the Committee on Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs

My name is Joanne Burke, and I live in Newmarket, NH. As a health professional, mother, and concerned resident, I submit testimony in strong opposition to the broad, negative impacts of **HB392** " AN ACT directing the dissolution of the department of health and human services' office of health equity, department of environmental services' functions for civil rights and environmental justice, and the governor's council on diversity and inclusion.

Though it is unclear why this bill was proposed, if enacted there are many potential negative economic, health and social consequences for our state. I will highlight my sobering concerns.

1. **It erodes our capacity to ensure that each resident of New Hampshire's civil rights are protected.** Civil rights are established by the U.S. Constitution and federal laws and are enforced by government agencies. Civil rights are designed to ensure that all people are treated equally under the law and are protected from discrimination. Agencies such as DHHS, Dept of Environmental Services, and the Governors Office need to be positioned to ensure ongoing protection of these rights in NH. Our state is more racially and ethnically diverse than during any other time in its history. Our increasing diversity demands that we have the capacity to identify at risk populations and equitably & justly honor the civil rights of all residents. In her inaugural address, Governor Ayotte Governor noted that was going to be a governor for all "[whether you're a Republican, Democrat, Independent, you name it. Our state is so much bigger than a party or an ideology.](#)"
2. **In the United States, the estimated economic burden of racial and ethnic health inequities between [\\$420 - \\$450 billion dollars in 2018.](#)** according to a 2023 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association. NH should be working to ensure all individuals, young and old, have equal opportunity to enjoy health, and lead productive lives. Now is not the time to make addressing health care inequities more difficult.

3. **This bill erodes our capacity to ensure economic justice.** One of the most well-documented ways in which individuals face discrimination in our state is demonstrated by the growing disparity in wages allocated to females compared to males in NH. The 2023 U.S. Census Bureau, data, and the related table released by the New Hampshire Employment Security, Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau clearly demonstrates this situation: For women working 40 hours a week in comparable occupations to men, [women in New Hampshire earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns](#). These differences in earnings are even more pronounced when considering race and ethnic minorities. This impacts a family's ability to put food on the table, to secure healthcare, to have a car repaired to get to work, and to save for retirement.
4. **It erodes our capacity to address environmental injustices.** Though there are numerous environmental risks, I will highlight PFAs. Residents in Merrimack and Portsmouth (and other communities in NH) affected by PFAS, the forever chemicals with many negative health consequences are living (and dying) with those impacts. Those parties who are knowingly responsible need to bear responsibility for that environmental injustice, not the innocent residents of those communities.
5. **It places health care workers and patients for whom English is not their primary language at risk.** For instance, the NH Office of Health Equity (OHE) has direct responsibility for ensuring access to interpretation/translation services for patients who may need such services. Except in times of medical emergencies, it is federal law that children do not function as interpreters for their family members. If a misunderstanding due to a child interpreter leads to a negative outcome or jeopardizes appropriate care, the organization relying on the child could face legal repercussions such as lawsuits for negligence or malpractice.

Our national pledge of allegiance closes with liberty and justice for all. This proposed bill chips away at those very commitments. NH is better than that. I urge you to oppose HB 392.

Respectfully,

Joanne Burke

Wage reference:

NH Employment Security

[Occupation by Sex and Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months for Full-time, Year-round Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over in New Hampshire](#) 

<https://www.nhes.nh.gov/elmi/statistics/pay-equity>