

January, 2020

Testimony in support of: House Concurrent Resolution 004: Concurrent Resolution Encouraging Cultural Intelligence and Linguistic Competence

Submitted by Matthew Wappett, Ph.D.

Dear Representative Winder, Representative Owens, and members of the House Economic Development and Workforce Services Committee. My name is Dr. Matthew Wappett and I live and work in Logan, Utah. I am the Executive Director of the Center for Persons with Disabilities (CPD) at Utah State University. The CPD is Utah's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and is a nationally recognized leader in research, training, and services for people with disabilities and the professionals who serve them. One of our most important activities over the past three years has been facilitating the Utah Community of Practice in Cultural and Linguistic Competence. This coalition is comprised of members from various state agencies and advocacy organizations who are committed to creating a more responsive and culturally competent service system for people with disabilities and their families. The goal of this multi-agency group is to promote evidence based policies that acknowledge the role that language, ethnicity, and culture play in the delivery of health and social services; and to proactively provide training and other supports that more effectively meet the needs of Utah's increasingly diverse population. The core members of this group include:

- The USU Center for Persons with Disabilities (CPD)
- The Disability Law Center (DLC)
- Utah Developmental Disabilities Council (UDDC)
- Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD)
- Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH)
- Utah Statewide Independent Living Council (USILC)
- Utah Parent Center (UPC)

Utah's population is one of the fastest growing in the nation and, according to an April 2019 report by the Kem C. Gardener Policy Institute at the University of Utah, Utah's population will continue to grow and become more diverse over the next 50 years. This increasing diversity is directly correlated with Utah's strong economic environment and our increasing global economic and cultural connections. The Gardner Institute projects that the share of Utah's minority population will increase from approximately 20% in 2015 to 35% in

2065. Half of Utah's population growth from 2015 to 2065 will come from minority populations, with Hispanics showing the largest numerical increase, although projections indicate that the population of individuals from Asian cultures and who identify as "Two or More Races" will more than double in that time (see: <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/Utah-Projections-Race-Ethnicity-2019.pdf>).

It is known that health and social outcomes are impacted by inequities linked to economic, socio-cultural, racial/ethnic, and geographic disadvantage. Racial and ethnic disparities are arguably the most obstinate inequities in health in the U.S., despite the many strides that have been made to improve health in the United States over the past 50 years. Navigating the U.S. health and social service system can be a challenge for even the most educated person, but it can be almost impossible for individuals who may speak a different language, or who do not understand our complex array of policies and programs. Because of this lack of understanding, individuals often neglect care and support for themselves and their families, which means that they often only receive care once they are in crisis. Health disparities are tremendously expensive for our healthcare system. A 2015 article in the Harvard Business Review estimated that health disparities cost the U.S. healthcare system \$35 billion excess health care expenditures, \$10 billion in illness-related lost productivity, and \$200 billion in costs related to premature death (see: <https://hbr.org/2015/10/the-costs-of-racial-disparities-in-health-care>). According to a 2018 report by the Utah Department of Health, over 1/3 of the legislative districts in the state of Utah ranked as high or very high for significant health disparities as a result of sociocultural factors (see: <https://health.utah.gov/disparities/data/ohd/HealthDisparitiesbyUtahStateLegislativeDistrict2019.pdf>). The districts that ranked as "Very High" for health disparities as measured by the Utah Health Improvement Index include large portions of Salt Lake City, Provo, Ogden, Logan, Cedar City, San Juan County, and Washington County.

Simply acknowledging that these disparities exist is not enough to fix the problem. State departments, nonprofit organizations, and businesses who work in the health and social services sector need to make intentional and informed efforts to develop plans, train staff, and evaluate the impact of their efforts in meeting the needs of Utah's diverse population. Some of these efforts are currently underway; for example, in addition to the workgroup that helped develop this resolution, the Utah Department of Health has an Office of Health Disparities that is working on these issues, and the Utah Department of Human Services has convened a multi-departmental workgroup to develop plans for addressing the needs of Utah's increasingly diverse population, but there is still a need to encourage other organizations and businesses who work in health and social services sector to proactively develop plans to meet the needs of cultural and linguistic minorities in Utah. This resolution is one mechanism to encourage organizations across the state to be more prepared to address the needs of our changing demographics.

As a result of Utah's continued strong growth it is imperative that Utah's health and social service system take proactive steps to ensure that individuals from all backgrounds have access to the care and support they need to be healthy, productive members of society. Preparing for this future will help Utah benefit from an increasingly diverse and talented population.

I urge you to support HCR 004 so that the people of Utah can all have an opportunity to access the healthcare and social services that they need, which will help contribute to an increased quality of life for everyone in our great state. Thank you for your consideration.