



AAAC

African-American Affairs Commission

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WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1997 by the Connecticut General Assembly, the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) works diligently to protect and support the interests of Connecticut African-Americans. In an effort to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of this community the AAAC advocates through policy, increasing cultural awareness and community networking. Equipped with the common goal of advancing the status of African-Americans, the Commission develops and utilizes partnership to produce change within this community.

OUR ROLE TO THE COMMUNITY

- The AAAC serves as a **watchdog** agency on policies that directly or potentially impact the African-American community.
- The AAAC is a **bridge** between the community and Legislature by connecting community advocates to legislators, educating the public on the legislative process, and assisting in organizing and mobilizing advocates in presenting their issues to the legislature.
- The AAAC is a **conduit** for receiving information from and giving information to the public including phone calls for such issues as housing, predatory lending, labor discrimination and state procurement practices. The Commission uses its resources and databases to refer citizens to various state agencies for assistance on a broad range of issues.

WHY THE COMMISSION IS NEEDED

In recent years the status of African-Americans in the state has improved. Although measurable gains have been made, disparities particularly remain in education, health and within the labor markets. The challenges facing African-Americans are numerous and this Commission's mission, in spite of the gains, has not yet been met. The Commission is an integral force in the effort to eradicate race-based disparities in the state. By providing both resources and a voice for the African-American community progress can continue to be made to improve conditions in the community.

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WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED

LEGISLATION:

Gun Control

Curbing urban violence and decreasing the incidence of homicide are top priorities for the AAAC. In 2007 the Commission supported the passing of Senate Bill 938—An Act Concerning the Reporting of Lost or Stolen Firearms and Illegal Firearms Trafficking. This law requires gun owners to adhere to more strict reporting requirements and sets increased penalties for gun owner negligence.

Fighting Pollution in Urban Communities

In 2008 the Commission was a key supporter of House Bill 5145—An Act Concerning Environmentally Stressed and Environmental Justice Communities. This bill aimed at reducing pollution in overburdened communities. A key feature of the bill is to empower citizens of these communities to participate in the decision making process when there are plans to locate polluting generating facilities in their neighborhoods.

Preventing Lead Poisoning

In 2007 the AAAC co-sponsored the Health Education Lead Poisoning Forum to educate the public about the implications of childhood lead poisoning. Presenters provided information regarding cognitive interventions for improving learning for children with cognitive, behavioral and developmental disabilities as well as lead poison prevention, and resources for residential and environmental remediation.

Organ Donation Awareness

In the 2005 Legislative Session, the Commission championed HB 6717 – *An Act Concerning Organ and Tissue Donation*. Recognizing that there is a shortage of organ donors especially in the African-American community, this initiative seeks to increase the number of ways a person can become an organ and tissue donor in our state.

Establishing a Sickle Cell Center

In 2006 Commission was successful in securing funding, towards the establishment of the state's first treatment center for congenital blood disorders. Sickle cell is one of the many blood disorders that affects a disproportionate number of African-Americans in the State. This is significant considering that prior to this legislation such a center was non-existent, neither was there any funding to address this issue.

Combating Hate Crimes

In 2008 in response to an increase in hate crimes regarding nooses in the state, the Commission championed Senate Bill 604—An Act Concerning Hate Crimes to address this problem. The bill makes it a discriminatory practice and crime to hang nooses on public or private property with intent to intimidate or harass another person.

Voting Rights Restoration for Ex-Felons

In 2001 the Commission was a leader in supporting the Voting Rights Restoration Act. The bill enables convicted felons who have completed their prison sentence the ability to exercise their vote. Prior to this bill more than 50,000 men and women were denied their right to vote.

PROGRAMS:

Access to Higher Education

Co-sponsorship of the *Know How to Go* and *College Goal Sunday (CGS)*. More than 15,000 middle and high school students throughout Connecticut have taken advantage of the multi-media and web based Know How To Go college preparation program. College Goal Sunday was held at 12 locations statewide. CGS helped to 900 first generation and economically disadvantaged high school seniors and their families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). By completing the FAFSA students became eligible for financial aid in the fall. Both initiatives help to increase access to post-secondary education for Connecticut students.

EVENTS:

Since the year 2000 the Commission has sponsored the *Annual Classic Awards* to recognize African-Americans in the community who contribute to attaining our mission. Over the years 53 awards have been presented to recipients who contribute to the life of Connecticut's African-American community. Their leadership is recognized for work in a variety of initiatives including education, business and economic development and lifetime achievements. In keeping with our commitment to education the Commission has distributed \$11,350 to 12 *Youth of the Year* scholarship recipients. Last year over 250 guests were in attendance. Scholarships will again be awarded to students in the spring.

OUTREACH:

For the past 3 years, the AAAC joined its efforts with the Department of Public Health, the American Heart Association, and National Kidney Foundation to increase awareness and prevention of chronic ailments such as diabetes, stroke, kidney and cardiovascular disease, through informational events and public media. The Commission plays a vital role in establishing protocols for outreach and standards for culturally competent service delivery to communities of color through its active participation in the Connecticut Multi-Cultural Health Partnership. Most recently the AAAC serves on the newly formed Commission on Health Equity (CHE).

In 2005 the AAAC created and developed a half- hour public affairs program to inform constituents and state residents about how legislative and administrative policies are likely to affect Connecticut's African American community. Since then *AAAC Update* has been used to connect Connecticut residents to information and resources statewide. The program is distributed via 11 cable access channels. To date 23 programs have been produced and broadcast to more than 70,000 households.

GOALS FOR 2009 AND BEYOND

In 2009 the goal for the State of Connecticut African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) will be with the economy. The African-American community continues to be adversely affected by the State and national economy. The AAAC will remain vigilant in its mission to ensure that African-Americans in Connecticut do not lose footholds gained during the past decade by closing racial disparities in jobs, educational opportunities, health and human services, judicial reform and affordable housing. The AAAC will work diligently to continue and increase the African-American community's active engagement in any state or federal economic stimulus initiatives and thereby strengthen the overall well-being of Connecticut.

The Commission continues to pursue an important agenda.

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