



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Friday, March 24th, 2006

1:00 PM in Room 2E of the LOB

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency committed to advocating on behalf of African-Americans in the state, through research, policy analysis and advocacy. The Commission is here today to testify in support of two bills:

H.B. 5818 – An act concerning lost or stolen firearms

And

H.B. 5780 – An act concerning safe schools

Firstly in reference to ***HB 5818*** some may argue that guns don't kill, but rather its people who kill, however the fact remains that guns are dangerous weapons if

found in the wrong hands have the ability to cause great harm not only to the intended victim but in some cases those in the immediate vicinity. In fact studies show that for every person who dies from a gunshot there are at least two others who are seriously wounded. In 2003 African-American males had higher death rates resulting from firearms than any other group in the state. Overall African-Americans make up 9 percent of the state's population, yet at one point accounted for 37 percent of all the firearm related injuries in the state.¹ The Commission is aware that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to violence in urban communities; however there is no denying that stronger accountability measures for gun ownership will provide law enforcement additional tools needed to keep guns out of the wrong hands, hence reduce the incidence of violence from guns. **HB 5818** seeks to establish safeguards needed in preserving public safety and curbing violence. For these reasons the Commission strongly supports the bill.

The Commission also supports **HB 5780**. Studies show that certain mandatory minimum laws potentially discriminate against certain groups. One such law the Commission opposes prohibits the sale of drugs in, at or within 1,500 feet of a school, public housing, or day care center. Although the intent of these statutes is to protect children from exposure to drugs, the unintended consequences are that minorities, the majority of whom live in urban communities receive harsher sentences for crimes which would otherwise carry lesser sentences in other areas of the state. Based on a recent report conducted by the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities, an estimated fifty percent of Connecticut's male prison population came from the states three largest cities, Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport,² regions of the state where this law is in effect. That same report cited that African-Americans are more likely to have charges associated with mandatory minimums. The vast majority of African-Americans 43 percent of the

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System*, www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars

² Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System, *2004 Annual Report*

state's prison population are incarcerated for drug related crimes.³ This bill seeks to correct these inequities. Accordingly the Commission supports the intentions of this bill.

Thank you all for your time and attention to this matter.

³ Connecticut Department of Corrections, *Incarcerated Population by Race and Ethnicity, July, 1st, 2005*