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**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee**

**Monday, March 20th, 2006**

**12:00 PM in Room 2C of the LOB**

Good afternoon, Chairpersons and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes and I am the Legislative Analyst with 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 testifies in support of

***HB 5700 – An act concerning justice for all children***

The Commission in past sessions and currently has been proactive in supporting state policy and initiatives intended to address the overall problem of prison overcrowding in state prisons and seeking workable strategies and solutions. Recent reports indicate that a continuum of prison reform initiatives implemented in earlier sessions are taking effect in reducing the overall state prison

population, while maintaining public safety. While these efforts are certainly laudable, the Commission recognizes that to sustain this positive trend in years to come the state needs to focus its efforts more on preventive initiatives at the juvenile level. The main concern for the Commission is the continued existence of racial disparities in detention at the juvenile level. It is well documented that in the state today minority juveniles are more likely than other juveniles to become involved in the juvenile justice system. This overrepresentation is apparent at various levels, arrest, detention, prosecution, and may intensify as juveniles continue through the system. Here in Connecticut it is estimated that 65 percent of all incarcerated persons under the age of 18 are 17 years of age and of this number the vast majority are minority youth.<sup>1</sup> Overall roughly 75 percent of the juveniles in state detention facilities today are minorities.<sup>2</sup>

Equally disturbing is the fact that these disparities are not superficial but rather inherent within the criminal justice system. For instance it interesting to note that such disparities are similarly reflected in the number of minority judges in the criminal justice system. Based on reports from the Office of the Chief State's Attorney of the 265 state prosecutors and administrators only 13 are minorities<sup>3</sup>. It is hard to imagine how this disparity does not in some way impact decisions made in the courts as to who gets detained and who receives probation etc. In view of these findings it is time for the state to begin seriously addressing disparities within Connecticut's criminal justice system. ***Raised Bill 5700*** seeks to establish race neutral criteria to monitor and track decisions being made in the juvenile justice system and the Commission strongly supports this measure. It's our hope that this bill in combination with other proven successful strategies will bring equity and fairness in the way justice is rendered in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, *Disproportionate Minority Confinement: Lessons Learned from Five States*

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Department of Children and Families, *Data on Juveniles in Detention*

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Chief State Attorney's Office, *Prosecutors Breakdown by Race, Sex and Ancestry*