

Public Hearing Testimony

Speaker:

Glenn Cassis

1409, 1411, 1413

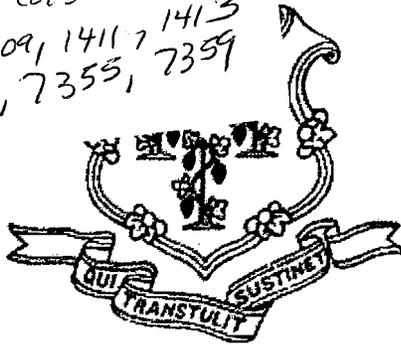
Bill Number:

73481

1405, 7355, 7359

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

**Monday March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

**12.30 PM in Room 1E of the LOB**

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director representing the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non partisan state agency committed to advocating on policies aimed at improving the well-being of African-Americans in the state. The Commission is here today to comment on the following education initiatives.

***House Bill (HB) 7348 – An act concerning after school and out of school time grants.***

***Raised Bill (RB) 1405 – An act concerning intervention model for schools in need of improvement and concerning urban education***

***(HB) 7355 – An act concerning a study of universal preschool***

***(RB) 7359 – An act concerning a grant program to combat truancy***

***(RB) 1409 – An act concerning regionalization of education to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation***

***(RB) 1411 – An act concerning youth service bureaus***

***and***

***(RB) 1413 – An act concerning in-school suspensions***

Education remains the number one priority for the Commission for any number of reasons. Firstly we realize that education opens up opportunities for youth, not only setting them along career paths, but also instilling the discipline they need to become mature adults. More importantly there is a strong correlation between lack of education and delinquent behavior. The bills we will speak on today are extensive, well intentioned with many components that touch on different aspects of closing the achievement gap. In the interest of time I will focus on those aspects that are priorities on our agenda. In general the Commission is in agreement with stronger accountability measures for all schools supported by funding, increasing the pool of qualified teachers, individual education plans for students and wider range of education choices for parents and students..

In reference to ***HB. 7355*** access to quality preschool is critical in childhood development as numerous studies continue to confirm. Children, especially those from minority communities who have attended preschool, demonstrate better reading proficiency and higher attendance rates. Unfortunately it is evident that such programs are unevenly distributed across the state. It is estimated that 9,700 children in priority school districts are not currently being served, in any formal preschool setting.<sup>1</sup> ***HB. 7355*** seeks to conduct a feasibility study in

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Legislative Research, *Universal Preschool Proposals in Connecticut*

consideration of future expansion of pre schooling in the state. The Commission is supportive of this effort.

This Commission has consistently supported after school programs recognizing that learning shouldn't cease once school ends. Those students who need extra help in improving their academic performance must be granted the opportunity unfortunately funding has not kept pace with the demand. It is estimated that less than a third of children from poor working families are not involved in any form of supervised after school program.<sup>2</sup> We ask that those programs that have a proven track record in positively impacting student performance are adequately funded as outlined in **HB 7348**.

Similarly the Commission is supportive of youth service bureaus as explained in **SB 1411**. An estimated 75 percent of the juveniles in state detention facilities today are minorities although 30 percent have been identified as needing some sort of mental health treatment.<sup>3</sup> Over 60 percent of state police departments interviewed in a study, indicated that alternatives for first time juvenile offenders would be used more often if they were available.<sup>4</sup> Youth service bureaus offer the first line in defense in diverting youth from the juvenile justice system and must be accessible to all in the state.

The Commission shares the view that strengthening families should be a part of any policy discussion in closing the achievement gap. Roughly fifty percent of African-American households are headed by a single parent usually female; however we also know that the presence of a male role model is critical in nurturing and providing at risk youth with the guidance and protection they need. Without this male figure some will seek membership in gangs. Gangs unfortunately offer the closest semblance to a family. For these reasons we are supportive of the language in Section 4 of **RB 1405**. This bill seeks to increase

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<sup>2</sup> National League of Cities

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut Department of Children and Families, *Data on Juvenile Detention*

<sup>4</sup> Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System, *2003-04 Annual Report and Recommendations*

mentorship opportunities in the state. The presence of a mentor for the youth can make the difference between success and failure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.