



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Education Committee

Public Hearing

Tuesday, February 13th, 2007

LOB – RM 1D

12.00 PM

Good morning/afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of this Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis and I am the Executive Director representing the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The Commission is a state legislative agency charged with influencing policy and legislation affecting the socio-economic status of African-Americans in the state of Connecticut. I am here today to speak in support of the following bills:

Senate Bill (SB) 1094 – An act concerning bullying

(SB) 1060 – An act concerning school expulsions

In response to *SB 1094*, the Commission recognizes that closing the achievement gap continues to be a critical factor in addressing socio-economic disparities facing our youth today. However we must be reminded that students

can only improve their academic performance within safe learning environments. African-Americans are twice as likely as whites to be suspended or expelled. Here in Connecticut an estimated 75 percent of the juveniles in state detention facilities today are minorities.¹ Bullying, truancy and gangs have been identified as socially destructive behavior that undermine student academic performance. Accordingly this Commission supports stronger, comprehensive school safety measures that focus on prevention and crisis intervention. More importantly the Commission recommends that conflict resolution and character education programs be strengthened in urban school districts. If implemented effectively such programs will ensure safer learning environments.

Likewise the Commission voices its support for (SB) 1060. As has already been stated in the preceding paragraph as a group African-American students experience higher rates of expulsion than their white counterparts. Nationally it is reported that only 41 percent of black male students graduated from high school in a given year.² Here in Connecticut the story is not much different, 26 percent of African-Americans in the state, who are 25 years or older, have less than a high school diploma.³ The Commission recognizes that in addressing school safety, stronger punitive measures in school districts are needed. However in addition, strengthening families and mentoring programs are equally critical in the larger context. Therefore the Commission supports this bill, with the hope that all factors are taken into account. The Commission is available to lend its expertise and work with stakeholders in reducing expulsion rates and the consequences, such as youth violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ *Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Data on Juveniles in Detention*

² *Black Star Project, The Holocaust of Black Men In America*

³ *U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Educational Attainment For Connecticut Residents 25 years and older by Race/Ethnicity*