



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591
(860) 240-8555
FAX (860) 240-8444**

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Wednesday, April 4th, 2007

11:00 am in Room 2C of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor 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 the following bills

HB 6285 – An act concerning the age of a child with respect to juvenile court jurisdiction

SB 398 – An act establishing a trafficking in persons council.

and

HB 7407 – An act concerning citizen oversight at the Department of Correction

The Commission 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. 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 the vast majority are minorities.¹ Overall it is estimated that 75 percent of juveniles in the states detention facilities are minorities.² In view of these findings it is time for the state to begin seriously addressing disparities within Connecticut's juvenile justice system. ***HB 6285*** seeks to establish the infrastructure within which juvenile justice reform will be implemented. The Commission is supportive of these efforts. It is the Commission's expectation that this bill in combination with other proven successful strategies will bring equity and fairness in the way justice is rendered to juveniles in the state.

In reference to ***SB 398*** the Commission has been a part of the state Human Trafficking Task Force charged with addressing human trafficking in the state. The work to combat human trafficking that comes in many forms must continue. Every so often newer information on human trafficking in the state makes the

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

² Connecticut Department of Children and Families, *Data on Juveniles in Detention*

headlines in newspapers across the country, confirming what has been suspected for a long time. To address this social injustice it will take a collaborative effort of all the members of the task force. Accordingly the Commission is supportive of continued efforts to address this problem in the state through the creation of a council.

The Commission's response to **HB 7407** is that, the vast majority of inmates in correctional facilities in the state today are African-Americans, estimated at 43 percent. While there have been efforts to address the concerns of the state's inmate population, there are still needs that remain unfulfilled. Establishing a formal entity that includes the voices of the families of those incarcerated would be helpful, in bringing clarity and newer perspectives on the myriad problems inmates face. Therefore the Commission supports any efforts to involve citizens in the framing of policy and decisions that impact the lives of their loved ones incarcerated

Thank you for the opportunity to testify