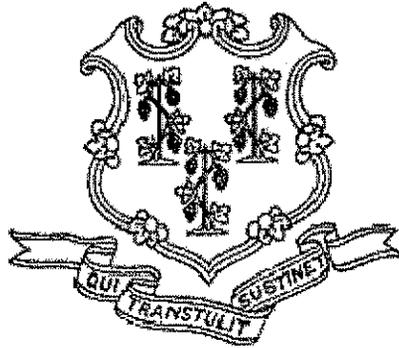


PH Testimony Date: 2/29/08
Bill # 5590
Speaker: FRANK SYKES
LEGISLATIVE ANALYST (AAAC)



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

Testimony before the Education Committee

Friday February 29th, 2008

12.00 pm in Room 2C of the LOB

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and ranking members of the Education Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst representing the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). I am here today to testify in support of the following bills:

House Bill. 5591 – An act concerning healthy teens

House Bill. 5593 – An act concerning special education and instructional methods concerning autism and other developmental disabilities

And

House Bill. 5593 – An act concerning early reading success grants

The Connecticut Department of Public Health reports that African Americans comprised 9 percent of Connecticut's population, yet made up 36 percent of persons living with AIDS as of June 30, 2002.¹ Newer and more disturbing information demonstrates that HIV infection rates are growing in African-American communities especially among African-American women and the youth. There are of course other sexually transmitted diseases that need equal attention and that are a gateway to more lethal diseases like HIV/AIDS. Youth between the ages of 13 - 24 account for 70% of the state's Chlamydia cases and 50% of Gonorrhea cases. 27% of reported HIV cases are in people under the age of 29,² which means most were infected as teens. Prevention is always better than cure and it is for this reason the Commission supports **House Bill. 5591**. This bill seeks to provide critical education on sexually responsible behavior to the youth.

Research tells us that on average, kids from wealthier homes start out with a minimum of 30,000 words whereas those from low-income backgrounds start out with only 5000 words.³ This disparity will continue throughout a child's development unless there are early intervention programs to correct the deficiency. Through discussion it has also come to our attention that even some Jobs First participants with high school diploma's still have reading difficulties preventing them from securing jobs capable of uplifting them from poverty. These same parents will have challenges educating their own children and providing parental guidance and involvement in their children's academic development. **House Bill. 5593** calls for more effective reading plans and summer reading programs in priority school districts and as such the Commission supports this proposal.

¹ Connecticut Department of Public Health, *Comparison of HIV/AIDS cases by Select Demographics and Risk/Mode of Transmission Characteristics*

² Connecticut Aids Resource Coalition

³ The Education Trust, *The Education Divide Begins Before School Age*

In reference to ***Raised Bill. 5590***, it has been confirmed in a study conducted by the Connecticut Lead Poisoning Prevention Program that 65 percent of children living in Connecticut's 5 largest cities had elevated blood lead levels greater than the normal level.⁴ The effects of lead poisoning in childhood development are well documented, reduced IQ, impaired growth, reading and learning disabilities are just a few of the many health related consequences. Often times these impairments are often overlooked in some cases misdiagnosed as other illnesses due to insufficient knowledge and expertise about lead poisoning. In view of this we respectfully request that language included in this bill reflect the needs of children affected by lead poisoning.

We urge your support on these bill and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

⁴ Connecticut Department of Public Health, *Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. A Plan for the Elimination of Childhood Lead Poisoning by 2010*

100