



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
March 17th, 2008
Room 2C
12.00 Noon**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes, the Legislative Analyst representing the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The Commission is here today to testify in support of,

Senate Bill 604 – An act concerning hate crimes

Before I begin I will like to state for the record that this Commission condemns all forms of hate crimes regardless of what race or ethnicity the perpetrator or victim represent. The purpose of this bill though is to address a recent resurgence in hate crimes across the state and indeed the nation. The most recent report released by the FBI shows that nationally there were a total of 9,652 victims identified in hate crimes and more than half, 52 percent were targeted because of

race.¹ Data from the FBI on hate crimes in Connecticut mirror this report and shows that race is still the number one motivating factor in such crimes. Indeed in the aftermath of the Jena Six incident in Louisiana, noose hanging became a fashion statement. Connecticut unfortunately had its share with at least 5 reported noose-hanging incidents in the span of 6 months last year. Not to mention the many more incidents that may have occurred but were not reported for fear of retaliation. Some view this behavior as merely a prank but for many in the African-American community, noose-hanging is nothing less than an expression of hate and a symbol of oppression. In the Jim Crow era more than 3,000 people were lynched from the late 1800's through the early 1900's, crimes for which the victims had no protection from the law.² During this period noose hanging was regarded as merely entertainment for some. As such noose-hanging today conjures similar emotions for African-Americans as a swastika does for members of the Jewish community. Rightfully then this bill seeks to strengthen Connecticut's hate crime statutes to make it punishable by law, to display a noose in a way that is intended to harass or intimidate. Perpetrators of this crime must at least understand that such behavior will not be tolerated and there will be consequences following such actions.

Since the spotlight is on hate crimes I will use this opportunity to call your attention to the issue of multicultural education in our schools. There certainly needs to be increased anti-bias education in schools to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place. It all begins with the understanding of the history of different races and ethnicity. Unfortunately in our state today the need for strengthening multicultural education in school curricula is often undervalued. We ask for your support in making this matter a priority. Ignorance can no longer be an excuse.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ FBI 2006 Hate Crime Statistics

² Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Study on Lynchings