



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the General Administrative and Elections Committee

Monday, March 23rd, 2009

9:30 AM in Room 2B of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of this Committee. My name is Frank Sykes and I am the Legislative Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The Commission represents a voice for the African-American community in the state legislature. I am here today to speak in support of proposed *House Joint Resolution (HJ) 1*

The issue before us today can be somewhat complex and even polarizing. Nevertheless the Commission recognizes that this discussion and dialogue on race relations must happen in order for Connecticut and indeed this country to continue improving its moral standing on race relations. I must stress that this resolution is not intended at all to determine who is at fault. Rather its simply an exercise of reconciliation on what is long overdue. Opportunities such as this must be seized especially in light of the fact that this country recently took a giant stride in electing its first African-American President. While this is encouraging it should inspire us and challenge us to continue peeling away at the layers of racial discrimination and intolerance. Without question different racial and ethnic

groups may also have suffered various forms of discrimination and oppression in this country at one time or another. However without question slavery was unique in the legacy it left behind. Across the spectrum of socio-economic issues disparities persist that have occurred partly as a result of a system which was designed to oppress a single group of people. Disparities in income and wealth, education achievement, health outcomes, employment discrimination etc. are not coincidental but rather are the vestiges of a past that linger on today. Why do some blacks with in some cases higher incomes and assets as whites still receive higher mortgage rates from financial institutions? Why are there such huge disparities in sentencing across races? The very existence of the Commission I work for is ample evidence that something wrong happened that must be corrected.

We also understand that it would be wrong to lump a single group of people as being culpable for something they had no direct involvement in or in some cases their ancestors were not a part of. Nonetheless this legacy we inherited created beneficiaries and unfortunately victims. For those who believe in justice and fairness the responsibility then is to help to improve race relations in this country regardless of your race and ethnicity.

Accordingly the aim of this resolution is to reconcile these differences and begin the healing process necessary for wholeness and unity. This resolution seeks to close one chapter of this state's hideous past by offering a formal apology. It seeks to continue the dialogue towards racial harmony in the past the present or the future. While this is not all that can and should be done in addressing the cancer of racism we see it as a step in the right direction, hence we support it. Some may say that this legislation is not far reaching enough. Others may say its not necessary but none can say an apology is the wrong thing to do.

I urge you to support this resolution and thank you for the opportunity to testify.