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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

PUBLIC HEARING

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

10:00 AM in Room 1E of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of this Committee. My name is Frank Sykes, the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Commission (AAAC). The Commission is a non partisan state agency committed to advocating on behalf of African-Americans in the state. I am here today to speak in support of S.B. No. 633 ***An act establishing a mentoring program for certain high school and college students.***

We the Commission strongly recognize the value of mentoring as it relates to child/student development. The benefits are priceless not only to individuals but to society as a whole. The Developing Tomorrow Professionals (DTP) is a model program for our state because it has yielded positive outcomes since its inception. It is administered through the Department of Education and began full operations in 2007. To date, collectively a total of 9 high schools in New Haven, West Haven and Meriden are participating in the program. 33 young men are

completing the DTP academic college enrichment courses in reading, writing and math and all are scheduled to graduate this year and 8 have achieved honor roll status for the 2008-09 school year. Mentoring is critical, especially in communities where single parenting is the norm. Roughly 50 percent of African-American households are headed by a single parent usually female with numbers expected to grow.¹ We also know that minority males are almost four times likely to be expelled from school and experience a 50 percent drop out rate annually.² Unfortunately without a male figure present, in some cases male youth lack the guidance, influence and structure to confront the many challenges they will face in the school and in their communities. Thanks to programs such as the DTP program which emphasize, professionalism, academic excellence, leadership skills, job readiness and proper etiquette, these kids now have the self-belief and maturity to stay in school. They have been given a second chance.

Since this is such a successful program we believe it should be expanded to Hartford and other regions of the state. The consequences of educational failure are lifelong and predictable. It costs \$3,300 per student to complete this program and instill the proper values necessary to avoid school failure, delinquent behavior and ultimately incarceration, whereas it cost up to \$40,000 annually to warehouse a career criminal in this state. In tight budget times as the one we are currently facing, the few dollars that can be invested should pay big dividends in lean years ahead. In view of these facts we recommend that the federal incentive funds that come to the state be targeted in full towards this initiative. This way the DTP model can be expanded to other parts of the state.

The AAAC is also in a partnership with local organization's in New Haven to pilot "Future 5" a new mentoring program which will match youth with multiple

¹ Kids Count, *U.S. Census Bureau, African-American Children, State Level Measures of Child Well-Being*

² Connecticut State Department of Education

mentors' depending on the youth's particular interests and needs. The AAAC plays a key role in recruiting mentors.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.