

February 10, 2009

Senator Toni Harp and Representative John Geragosian  
Appropriation Committee Co-Chairs  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Senator Harp and Representative Geragosian:

This letter is to urge you to prevent the elimination of Connecticut's African American Affairs Commission. As you know, the African American Affairs Commission is the only state agency specifically designed to represent the interests of Connecticut's large and growing African-American community. It is also a symbol of our struggle for freedom, equality, voting rights, and dignity as a people. To close the Commission's doors represents a significant step backward—not only for our community but for all Americans. Also, it would signify a "silencing" of our people, and an assault on our rich and distinguished heritage. Finally, it would diminish the disparities in health, education, and the workplace that continue to exist among our people, and undermine the importance of an entity that advocates on our behalf.

We have seen what happens when dedicated agencies for the vulnerable—ethnic communities, women, children, gays/lesbians, seniors, and others—do not exist. Disparities grow, hate crimes increase, and people's fundamental human rights jeopardized. Of all times, *in this economy and in view of the level of violence and poverty in our community*, now is *not* the moment to shut down agencies striving to make our voices heard.

The Commission's accomplishments are many:

Gun control – Key supporter of Senate Bill 938, requiring gun owners to adhere to more strict reporting requirements and increasing penalties for gun owner negligence.

Fighting Pollution in Urban Communities – Key supporter of House Bill 5145, aimed at reducing pollution in overburdened communities, and to empower citizens of these communities to participate in the decision making process when there are plans to locate polluting generating facilities in their neighborhoods.

Prevention of Lead Poisoning – Co-sponsorship of the Health Education Lead Poisoning Forum to educate the public about the implications of childhood lead poisoning.

Organ Donation Awareness – Champion of HB6717, which recognizes there is a shortage of organ donors, especially in the African-American community, this initiative seeks to increase the number of ways a person can become an organ and tissue donor in our state.

Establishment of a Sickle Cell Center – Securing funding to ensure the establishment of the state's first treatment center for congenital blood disorders. Sickle cell is one of the many blood disorders affecting a disproportionate number of African-Americans.

Combating Hate Crimes – In response to an increase in hate crimes regarding nooses in Connecticut, championed Senate Bill 604 to make it a discriminatory practice and crime to hang nooses on public or private property with intent to intimidate or harass another person.

Voting Rights Restoration for Ex-Felons – In 2001, served as a leader in supporting the Voting Rights Restoration Act, which enables convicted felons who have completed their prison sentence the ability to exercise their vote. Before this, more than 50,000 men and women were denied their right to vote.

As one of the founders of the largest African-American arts and cultural organization in the State, I urge you to do all that is possible to ensure the future of the African American Affairs Commission.

Yours sincerely,

Dollie McLean  
Founding Executive Director