



State of Connecticut

African-American Affairs Commission

State Capitol

210 Capitol Avenue – Room 509

Hartford, CT 06106

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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

Wednesday, December 9, 2009

2:00 PM in Room 2C of the LOB

My name is Glenn A. Cassis, Executive Director for the State of Connecticut African-American Affairs Commission. I want to offer this testimony on Governor Rell's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan.

The Governor's Plan calls for the elimination of all the Legislative Commissions including the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The current fiscal budget reduced the AAAC by slightly more than fifty percent. Despite reducing the staff in half, the Commission has remained committed to its mission to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of the African-American community through advocacy, information sharing, cultural awareness, community networking and influencing legislation. The Commission currently has a principal role in initiatives that continue to have a major impact on the quality of life for citizens in Connecticut.

In education the Commission continues to address the issue of access to a quality education for willing students and especially African-Americans. The AAAC considers the access to a quality education in Connecticut to be an issue of civil rights. The AAAC continues to help make access to education available and affordable for students. Currently the Commission shares in the coordination of College Goal Sunday – CT, a program that affords more than 800 high school and early college students and their families the opportunity to receive financial aid by completing their FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The Commission has coordinated 13 locations around Connecticut for students who routinely miss the opportunity to apply for financial aid to receive free assistance with completing the FAFSA (on January 31, 2010). The Commission applied for and received a \$140,000 three year grant from the Lumina Foundation for a re-granting program in Connecticut. The AAAC will make grant awards to educational organizations to initiate programs and services that will increase access and success for students going to college. Specifically Connecticut will join the other Lumina Foundation awarded states to increase the

percentage of college graduates from 39% to 60% by the year 2025. The AAAC is also in line to receive a \$19,000 grant award from the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships to build the statewide network that will help ensure that the path to access to higher education grows and expands for first generation and economically disadvantaged students in Connecticut. No other agency in the state has the expertise to manage and coordinate this effort. The AAAC is also a partner agency with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus in Campaign LEARN – to eliminate the achievement gap in Connecticut. The Commission will help influence legislation that will eliminate the educational achievement gap between children of color and the majority population.

The Commission continues to have a key role in coordinating outreach efforts to the African-American community in health. Just in the fall, the AAAC has helped sponsor a forum on addressing the impact of lead poisoning on youth and the appropriate educational response for servicing those adversely affected by elevated blood lead levels. The Commission is working with the American Red Cross Diversity Committee as it addresses the critical shortage of African-American blood donors (approximately 2% in CT) by hosting a blood drive on February 18, 2010. With assistance from the American Red Cross, sororities, fraternities, faith based and community based organizations at our disposal, the AAAC will help inform, educate and actively involve the African-American community of this pressing need. The Commission is working closely with the Southern Regional Sickle Cell Association to introduce legislation to provide research and services to the many people afflicted with this disease. The AAAC will rejoin the newly formed Commission on Health Equity. This Commission's role - to identify, evaluate, and eliminate these inequities among the citizens of Connecticut – is shared by the AAAC and its vital for us to be at the table. At the request of Rep. Jason Bartlett, the AAAC began working with Ann's Place the home of cancer support services. Many of the clients served by Ann's Place are not people of color. In the organization's strategy to reach African-Americans, they requested and received technical and network support from AAAC.

With the passage of Senate Bill No. 880 An Act Concerning Trade with Africa in June, the AAAC has been working closely with business, DECD, academia and the US Department of Commerce to help establish strong export and import ties between Connecticut and African countries. The Commission has served as a convener and is currently the only state agency assuring that progress in being made to establish trade with African countries.

The Commission is working very closely with the US Census 2010 on two very important levels. First, the Commission is disseminating information on the importance the census is to the African-American community. An accurate count will have a huge political and economic impact in the community. The Commission continues to provide opportunities for US Census 2010 to meet community leaders face to face and get the message across. The Commission will also disseminate Census information to hundreds of students and their parents during College Goal Sunday mentioned earlier. Secondly the AAAC continues to work with the US Census in its effort to hire more minorities for the coming Census. Prior to being hired by

the Census, adults need to take a test. The Commission has secured testing sites in African-American communities and has helped test takers with sharpening test taking skills. It is very important to the Census to have a diverse staff working in the community door to door. Jobs with the US Census begins at \$12.50 an hour. With the level of economic hardship face by the unemployed, this opportunity is well received.

As previously stated the African-American Affairs Commission took a sever budget cut in August and laid off half of the staff. The rich history and positive impact the Commission has secured over the past 11 years has allowed its current efforts to be fruitful and positive. As legislated by the Implementer House Bill No. 7007, the Commission will submit its RBA report by January 1, 2010 which will detail the progress the Commission is making on improving quality of life desired results of the African-American population in Connecticut. To eliminate this commission and the other commissions would be a disservice to the African-American community and to the State of Connecticut. We can ill afford to dismantle a commission that works.

Thank you for accepting my testimony.

Glenn A. Cassis
Executive Director