



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION  
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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**

**Monday, March 9, 2009**

**1:30 PM in Room 1B of the LOB**

Good morning/afternoon, Chairpersons and members of the Education Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. Created by the Legislature in 1997, the Commission represents a voice for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis, advocacy and outreach.

A high school diploma is the first benchmark to successful adulthood. A person without a high school diploma has a limited future. Studies show that a person that drops out of high school will not find a job that will earn enough income to sustain a family in Connecticut. Nearly eighty percent of inmates in Connecticut's correctional institutions have not completed high school. With a shortage of an educated workforce needed to meet the demands of business and industry, Connecticut must do whatever it can to increase high school graduation. House Bill 5769 – **An Act Concerning School Drop Outs** seeks to respond to this

concern. By raising the age from 16 to 17 and then to 18 before a student can withdraw from school with parental consent will help address this concern.

House Bill 5967 recognizes that students are diverse in their learning styles and may not fit the traditional school environment. This bill mandates districts to offer alternative schools in or outside the home district. By extending the date for reporting student drop outs to before April 1<sup>st</sup>, school districts will have the financial incentive to keep students enrolled in school well into the year. The Educational Cost Sharing formula will be based on retention rather than early year attendance.

Finally the drop out issue is severest in urban school districts that enroll the highest number of African-American and Latino students. There is very little a person under the age of 18 can do legitimately to earn a respectable income. There are greater opportunities for them in school to stay on the right track. By implementing plans to address at risk students as early as middle school, educators will broaden the remedy to drop out prevention. These districts need the support of the General Assembly to help redirect students on the right path. Supporting a student's intellectual growth and development until the age of majority is a sound investment.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

Glenn A. Cassis  
Executive Director