



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591  
(860) 240-8555  
FAX (860) 240-8444**

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee**

**Monday April 4<sup>th</sup>, 10.00 am, Room 2C**

Good morning, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency and an advocate for the state's African-American community. We thank Senator Coleman for his commitment, passion and guidance in helping us raise *Senate Bill (SB) 1230 – An Act Concerning Traffic Stop Information*.

A focus of our work includes ensuring fairness in the criminal justice system by addressing unwarranted racial and ethnic disparities in how justice is served. It is no coincidence that roughly 44 percent of the children represented in detention centers in the state are African-American<sup>1</sup> and at least 42 percent of African-Americans make up the state's prison population.<sup>2</sup> The lifetime likelihood of incarceration for African Americans is 16.2 percent almost twice that of Hispanics at 9.4 percent and more than six times that of whites at 2.5 percent. As we can see, the statistics are heavily stacked against African-Americans in all areas of

---

<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Voices for the Children, *Reforming Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System. Racial and Ethnic Biases*

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Inmate Population by Race and Ethnicity

criminal justice. It is in this spirit we speak in support of *Senate Bill (SB) 1230 – An Act Concerning Traffic Stop Information*.

**SB 1230** emerged as result of an initial bill the Penn Act introduced to address the issue of racial profiling in our state at the time. Racial profiling by law enforcement is wrong on many grounds. First it is inconsistent with our democratic values and violates the equal protection rights of citizens under the constitution. A race-based assumption in law enforcement perpetuates negative racial stereotypes that are harmful to our rich and diverse democracy. It materially impairs our efforts to maintain a fair and just society. Furthermore using race, ethnicity, national origin or religion to single out people for police scrutiny only deepens racial divides in our state, creating an environment of mistrust between law enforcement and the victimized communities. This erosion in public trust makes it even more difficult for police to maintain respect for law and order in certain communities.

Most importantly racial profiling does nothing to promote public safety. For example, studies confirm that using racial profiling to interdict highway-bound suspected drug couriers is ineffective. A survey by the Department of Justice in 1999 revealed that while officers disproportionately focused on African-American and Latino drivers, they found drugs more often when they searched whites at 17 percent than when they searched African Americans at 8 percent. Another study by Lamberth Consulting reported that when U.S. Customs agents began using race-neutral factors such as behavior to identify drug smugglers they increased the rate of productive searches by more than 300 percent.<sup>3</sup>

A shocking case of racial profiling worth mentioning happened in New Jersey to Santiago Villanueva a black man from the Dominican Republic, who spoke minimal English. This was a man who suffered from epileptic seizures. Unfortunately one day Santiago had a seizure attack. Police were called to the scene, observing this behavior mistook his condition for a drug overdose. In

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org), The Truth About Racial Profiling, Five Facts

response they reportedly threw him on the ground, placed a knee on his back and caused him to stop breathing. He was given oxygen, gained consciousness for a short while, was handcuffed and taken to the hospital where he later died. Conversely even though racial profiling appears to disproportionately affect minorities whites can also be affected in certain instances, as was the case of John Allen Muhammad the D.C. sniper. In that case Muhammad managed to evade law enforcement for a while because police initially profiled the alleged sniper as a white male. Any of these incidents could happen anywhere in the country without the proper mechanisms in place to address law enforcement practices.<sup>4</sup>

The reason the Commission decided to revisit the issue of racial profiling is that the current system for reporting traffic stop data is ineffective. Unfortunately without empirical data it is impossible to assess the extent of racial profiling in the state, whether it is fact or fiction. The original purpose of what was written into law as the Penn Act is not working for a variety reasons, including but not limited to lack of resources, lack of a standardized and the lack of an effective system for collecting, analyzing and reporting data. The Commission believes that a comprehensive approach to addressing and eliminating racial profiling in traffic stops must include: 1) a ban on the practice of racial profiling, 2) the inclusion of a standardized and effective data collection system 3) a mechanism for creating and implementing strategies to address racial profiling patterns that may be unearthed, 4) equally important is a true partnership between law enforcement and the community to mediate alleged complaints of racial profiling – an oversight committee, and 5) resources secured to conduct independent analysis and evaluation of traffic stop data.

Rhode Island, Missouri and Illinois are three states that have enacted legislation that serve as models of the type of comprehensive efforts needed to effectively assess and address racial profiling. In these states, the ability to confront

---

<sup>4</sup> [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org), Threat and Humiliation, Racial Profiling, Domestic Security, and Human Rights in the United States

disparities in the number and types of police stops has laid the groundwork for a fairer system of justice and is helping to restore public confidence in the law enforcement community. For better results we urge Connecticut to follow their example.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.