

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

Testimony before the Education Committee

Monday, March 5th, 2012

12:00 PM in Room 2C

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community. We accomplish our mission primarily through research, policy analysis, outreach and information sharing. We are here today to speak in support of **House Bill (H.B) 5350** – *An act concerning achieving universal literacy by Grade 3* and **HB 5353** – *An act concerning individualized education programs and other issues relating to special education*

Firstly regarding HB – 5350 according to the Connecticut Department of Education, since 2006 the Connecticut Mastery Reading Test Scores for African-American children at the 4th grade has consistently been 20% points lower than the state average. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) findings, report that black students reading level at grade 4 has not improved. Once a student is this far behind at the 4th grade, special intervention must be provided if that child is expected to perform at grade level. Studies indicate that it is very difficult to correct this reading deficit beyond the 4th grade. By the fourth grade, elementary school teachers do not have the training to correct the students' reading deficiencies. Classroom teachers are expected to have 4th graders meet academic standards outlined in the State's Framework. Therefore it is important that resources are directed to children in K-3 to correct this imbalance.

However in addition, parental involvement is crucial in determining whether a child is placed in special education or not. For many low income minority families the lack of time, resources and conflicting schedules prevent many from maintaining active engagement in their child's academic development. In some cases schools make decisions on students without equal or sufficient participation from parents. Processes should be implemented, such that schools can work around a parent's schedule. In cases where that is not possible independent advocates should be easily accessible to represent the parents. This bill is not far reaching enough, however we are supportive of it because at least it seeks to put measures in place that should offer further examination of the correlation between teacher training and reading and how it impacts the misplacement of students in special education.

Regarding HB – 5353, the Commission generally agrees with the recommendations in the bill. Strengthening the communication process of the IEP between parents and staff is beneficial to all the stakeholders in improving academic performance. That said we feel that at some point it may be necessary to shorten the period when a child retests after the individual education plans (IEP) plan is established. It is our understanding that children in an IEP plan have to retest after 3 years yet some students may have already met the benchmarks set in the IEP, therefore it may be necessary that testing is done earlier to reflect the student's development. The purpose of the IEP should be to recognize and document improvement when such change occurs. Another concern we have is that when there is plan to change a child's paraprofessional the parents must receive prior notification. I know firsthand that this is not always case. Prior notification for an easier transition for parents, child and school should be beneficial to all parties.

In view of these findings we ask you to support both bills and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

