

Testimony for Public Hearing
Appropriations Committee
March 05, 2015

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Good Evening Appropriations Committee Members. My name is *Stephanie Johnson* and I am a Commissioner for the African-American Affairs Commission representing the town of East Lyme in New London County. I would like to thank you all for this opportunity to testify before the Appropriations Committee.

The AAAC has accomplished much in the last six months taking a leadership role in forming a coalition with several other African-American Affairs Commissions throughout the United States. Pooling our resources has allowed for a more uniform and strategic approach to tackle the many systemic issues affecting the African-American community in our country in 2015 and beyond, provided we maintain our funding as currently requested. In 2015 we have already worked on, or assisted with, compiling information for multiple legislative bills.

- Cultural Competency of educators in K-12 education
- Restorative Practices addressing chronic absenteeism/student drop outs
- Post-Secondary education student funding and debt
- Student Loan Bill of rights
- Access to affordable housing
- Access to affordable mortgages, fair mortgages and mortgage education
- Housing Mobility counseling for low income home and apartment renters
- Expanding access to small business express, specifically for minority businesses

I would implore you to support keeping the 2016 and 2017 budget as requested by the AAAC intact without any rescissions. Governor Malloy's revised budget for the remainder of FY2015 has already negatively impacted the work the AAAC is able to accomplish given our broad legislative mandates. Additional cuts to the budget of the AAAC for the FY2016 - FY2017 biennium for Connecticut would be detrimental to the work AAAC is doing to improve the overall quality of life for the African-American community in the areas of economic development, education, health and political well-being here in Connecticut. I recognize there may be additional cuts in Connecticut's FY2016 - FY2017 budget that is now under review by this legislative committee. We are all aware of the negative impact the 2008 financial crisis has had and continues to have on our country and the citizens of the great state of Connecticut. The brunt of this economic downturn has disproportionately distressed the middle class and many others living in the inner-cities of Connecticut. This is exactly the population for which the AAAC was explicitly commissioned to ameliorate conditions; their underserved needs scream for attention via the civic engagement our commission was mandated to do, especially in the

slow recovery we are experiencing from the worst economic downturn since the great depression.

We have partnered with organizations like the Urban League, NAACP, New Haven Promise and the Amistad Committee for informational, inspirational and recognition programs.

Programs we have either originated and or partnered with have had a direct and positive impact on the educational achievement gap and wealth disparity in the African-American community.

- One specific program the AAAC has worked on regularly that has assisted not only the African-American community, but multiple families in Connecticut with first time collegiate attendees, is College Goal Sunday.
- College Goal Sunday is a program that walks first time college students and their families through completion of the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) and access to grants and scholarships.
- The AAAC has served over 6600 first time CT college students and their family's average with this program since 2008.

Our alliances with these established organizations and other legislative agencies like CHRO and the Health Equity Commission have made us all more effective in our overall goals. We have assisted in providing testimony that was key to recent, critical updates to an important statute protecting not only those in the African-American community, but other citizens of the state that have been marginalized from heavy, uneven, and unlawful police practices for traffic stops . Findings from the Racial Profiling Prohibition Advisory Board will be released to the legislature and the public this month for 2013-2014.

- We are currently working with CHRO, the ADL, Central Connecticut State University and the ACLU on the implementation, review, and community awareness for Connecticut's Racial Profiling Prohibition Project.
- We have been contributory to the formation, funding, and responsiveness of Connecticut's racial profiling prohibition project. The Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act (Public Act 99-198) which prohibits any law enforcement agency from stopping, detaining, or searching any motorist when the stop is motivated solely by considerations of the race, color, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation (Connecticut General Statutes Sections 54-11 and 54-1m).
- We regularly work with you and others of your colleagues in the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to ensure that racial impact statements requested for key bills that affect minority communities excessively are accurate and readily available to make well informed decisions for all of Connecticut's constituents.
- The AAAC has been instrumental in pushing for progressive reforms in Connecticut's criminal justice system to provide second chances to those that have served their time for nonviolent crimes.

- We have up-dated the enabling legislation for the Commission of Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice system. This is an effort to expand the statute to include the Asian and Pacific American Affairs Commission, removing duplicative language in areas that are being covered by other similar commissions and narrowing the scope of the Commission in order to be able to focus on projects that can be accomplished with no funding.

With the diligent partnering of multiple legislatures in the General Assembly, we have gotten 17 out of 21 commissioners appointed to the AAAC. We look to have even more success in our legislative mandates once the final four commissioners are appointed which we expect relatively soon.

The budget as requested by the AAAC allows for a full staffing of four positions, one of which has not been filled (Information Officer) in four years. Please do not ask the AAAC to put ourselves at a disadvantage again that will impair our ability to be a progressive force in the lives of many African-Americans in Connecticut. An African-American Affairs Commission completely staffed and full board of commissioners will make for a stronger and more informed African-American community and by extension, a stronger and successful Connecticut. I would appreciate your support and careful consideration on the issue of keeping the AAAC's requested FY2016 – FY2017 budget intact as it was originally submitted.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Johnson