



## **State of Connecticut**

**African-American Affairs Commission**

**State Capitol**

**210 Capitol Avenue – Room 509**

**Hartford, CT 06106**

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Senator Slosberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle, Senator Winfield and Representative Sanchez and other distinguished members of the Education committee. My name is Subira Gordon and I am the legislative analyst for the African American Affairs Commission. The mission of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) is to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of the African-American community in the State of Connecticut.

I am writing today to provide comments on SB 944 AA Establishing a full day kindergarten requirement, HB 6837 AA Encouraging a graduated response model for student discipline, HB 6835 AAC English Language Learners and HB 6834 AAC collaboration between boards of Education and School resource Officers.

The AAAC supports SB 944 because we believe that all families should have access to full day kindergarten. For many low income families if there is no full day kindergarten children are not able to attend school until first grade. For some low-income students, not attending kindergarten can make a drastic difference in a child's life outcomes. This is a necessary step in helping to close the achievement gap in the state.

Next I would like to support HB 6837 and HB 6834 which both address very important issues to the AAAC. In school arrests, suspensions and expulsion rates are alarmingly high for African

American students in the state. Black students in the state are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students. Black male students are most likely to be suspended or expelled than any other group. In education reform schools as well as public charters the expulsion and suspension rates for black males is approximately 25%. These rates are unacceptable and the state needs to take responsibility for these terrible statistics and start to address the root problem of black males being suspended and expelled which also leads to the alarmingly high rate of black males who have entered into the criminal justice system. By adding the rates to the strategic school profile parents, policy makers and other interested parties will be able to readily find the information about suspensions and expulsions. Also included in both of these bills are required reporting on school based arrests. A 2013 report from Ct voices for children stated that black students were 3.7 times more likely to be arrested than white students. Racial disparities in student arrest rates are not confined to urban or suburban schools; 59% of school districts had higher arrest rates for black students than white students. I would like to thank the committee for raising these bills and I am hopeful this will be the first step in helping students who may be having behavioral problems in school rather than turning them over to the criminal justice system.

The AAAC also supports HB 6835 which would expand the requirements for school districts to provide ELL support for students. It changes the minimum student requirement from 20 students to 6 which opens up access for many students because Connecticut is a small state and many school districts are not meeting the 20 student threshold but still have a number of students needing ELL instruction. This bill also expands the maximum number of months of instruction for each student from 30 to 60. Research shows that 30 months is insufficient to fully develop the cognitive skills necessary for learning a second language.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today.