STATE OF CONNECTICUT
Commission on
Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

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Testimony of the Honorable Lubbie Harper, Jr., Chair,
Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

March 23, 2015

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing

S.B. 1114, AAC the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, Senator Doyle, Representative Fox and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of **S.B. 1114,** ***AAC the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System*****.** This proposal, which was unanimously endorsed by the members of the Commission, would amend the Commission's authorizing statute. Thank you for raising the bill.

The purpose of this bill is twofold. It would: (1) expand the Commission's membership and purview by broadening the populations it represents; and (2) refine the Commission's charge to more closely reflect the Commission expertise and strengths, as evidenced by the good work that the Commission has engaged in for nearly 15 years.

The Commission was created by the Legislature during the 2000 session and became operational on October 1, 2000. The authorizing legislation gave the Commission an expansive and ambitious charge – in essence, it asked the Commission to solve the long-existing issue of racial and ethnic disparity in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Since the Commission began its work, its members have worked diligently to do so. However, the Commission has not been provided with the resources necessary to fully address this important and complex issue. It has never been provided with state funding, and consequently hasn't been able to hire dedicated staff, secure its own offices or even purchase supplies. The Commission relies entirely on the voluntary efforts of its members, who have busy full-time jobs, and member agencies to accomplish its work.

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In order to make the best use of these limited resources, over the years the Commission has honed its focus to those areas where it can have the largest impact. These include sponsoring educational events targeted at those working in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, collaborating with state agencies and community organizations to facilitate conversation and get the word out, and promoting initiatives to address bias. This proposed amendment to the Commission's charge would bring it in line with these more achievable goals. It will also broaden the Commission's charge to include overrepresentation of all racial and ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system, thereby allowing the Commission to address the impact of changing populations over time.

I would note that the Attorney Natasha Pierre, the State Victim Advocate, has suggested additional language to be inserted in subsection (b) to specifically state that the Commission's purview includes consideration of the impact that racial and ethnic disparity has on victims of crime. I fully endorse her suggestion and urge you to adopt it as substitute language.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the Commission members, I thank you for your consideration and urge you to approve this bill.