



## **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 here to provide testimony on [S.B. No. 379](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE and [H.B. No. 5551](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS.

Thank you for creating a minority teacher taskforce which has met during the interim and come up with a list of recommendations. Students benefit from having teachers from diverse backgrounds. The percentage of minority teachers in the state is dismal at 6% when the minority student population in many of the State's urban schools standing at over 70% and over 40% for the state on a whole, and 64% of our school districts don't have an administrator of color. The AAAC thinks that these numbers have to change in the near future to give both non-white and white students the opportunity to see people of color in positions of power in their educational journey. The taskforce has come out with a long list of recommendations which will take a lot of effort and resources to make changes in the way that the state has traditionally approached recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators of color. For close to 10 years the state has been spending money on MTR and has not yielded significant results. **It is**

**important that for the future there is clear oversight of these funds and there should be outcomes based financing on such a critical issue.** I have submitted written testimony on another bill in education that will help to build a pipeline for minority teachers however there are some changes that can be done today to bring highly qualified teachers into the classroom. While the bill provides an extension of the taskforce I would like to provide some additional recommendations for the bill that can be implemented this year.

- **Examine the current alternative routes to certification so professionals who are experts in their fields can take that knowledge to the classroom in a short period of time without having to lose income during their transition similar to the NYC teaching fellow model.**
- **Create an alternative route to certification for all non-teaching professional staff.**
- **Examine the use of Praxis as a barrier to certification and consider it being used as an assessment tool.**
- **Create a reciprocity program that takes teachers who are certified in any state with NO limitations. We have to believe that once a teacher is qualified/certified in another state they can teach in Connecticut. We have the highest achievement gap in the nation and it is time to start using new approaches to closing this gap.**

Next I want to provide comment on HB 5551. In 2012 the Commissioner network was created as a part of Education reform efforts. On a recent trip to Lawrence MA I was able to visit two schools that had been placed in state receivership as a part of the MA turnaround efforts and both had seen great results in a short period of time. The student population was a majority free and reduced lunch which is similar to many urban schools in Connecticut. The school leadership as well as the teachers union all believed that the changes made were critical to helping to student growth in the schools visited.

Moving forward the State should take a look at the Commissioner's network and make some changes to the way it functions in order to achieve greater student achievement. While we understand that there are financial constraints on the system we think that once a low is

deemed low performing they should automatically be included on the Network. Also the network should only be using network funds for turnaround efforts and not to cover other holes in their budget. It is important to note that in Lawrence the budget of central office was cut significantly to push the extra money down to the students.

In looking ahead the AAAC believes that we need start this conversation about the commissioner's network and make a real effort to ensuring that the network is working properly and reaching its highest potential.

Thank you for your time