

Hello, Members of the Education Committee and committee chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez:

My name is Hillary Bridges, I am the Executive Director and founder of Students for Educational Justice and Black Heritage Academy in New Haven. I am also the Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at The Nantucket Project in Greenwich, CT. I am here in support of Bill 7082 *with* Students for Educational Justice's bill amendments, which you should have in front of you.

I grew up in the wealthy, white suburbs of Philadelphia. I was class president, homecoming queen, I was an excellent student, and had many friends. However, the thing that I wanted to be more than any of those things? Was white. Being Black felt like carrying a burden I didn't ask for. I had completely bought into the false narrative that white is better, prettier, more fun- just superior. As a descendant of enslaved African here in the U.S., nowhere in my education did I learn to feel positively about the amazing things my ancestors had accomplished. All the innovation, the seemingly endless endurance, the being pushed down and standing up again they did to put us where we are today. When asked- why didn't the slaves, your people, rebel? I had no answers until I learned that- in fact they did. Many times. And it was *their* relentless rejection of the system that ended slavery, *not* as we learn, a white man. Nor did I learn about the trillions of dollars my ancestors generated for the U.S. economy, especially for places in the North like NYC, RI, and the last state in NE to abolish slavery: CT. I never learned about the places my 90-year-old grandparents weren't allowed to buy property as a result of Redlining and about how that limited their ability to accumulate wealth.

Data shows that teaching students that this country is a meritocracy in which hard work matters more than ethnicity is damaging. It's damaging because it's not true. Hence why, we must learn the truth about how this country came to be and what keeps the disparities we see around us in place. Learning about MLK and Sonia Sotomayor is wonderful, and important but is NOT going to answer that question around the disparities we see today. Only if we teach the history of the creation of "race" as a concept and then how that distinction was utilized to give "white" people *only* access to full rights and capital for centuries will we start to understand the truth. When many non-black people hear about African American Studies, they think oh, that's not my history. But they're wrong. Black history cannot be separated from American history. Black history is American History. American History is Black History. My family has been here probably longer than most of your families, building his place where you and your ancestors could come to, and where because the color of your skin- if you are white, most of you get a pass that I still don't. And all peoples of color benefit from the work Black people in this country did to gain our basic rights. In fact, they too often benefit *more* than us because of their proximity to whiteness. This state, from its cities and summer homes in Litchfield County to its de facto segregated schools, is only explained by race and racism.

Again I support bill 7082 with these amendments:

1. Change the title and the required content to include the History of Race and the History of Racism. We will gladly create a sample curriculum for it. We're already on it.
2. Teachers need to be trained through racial bias trainings in order to teach this factual content that they themselves have never learned.
3. We need a committee of teachers, students, and critical race theory experts to oversee

implementation of this content and these trainings.

I also support bill 7083 with and only with the understanding that Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in the U.S. only exist in the context of the unique contributions of Black Americans in this country.

If you decide to make an African American, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies combined bill, we at SEJ and our partner orgs will be tremendously disappointed. We have a huge opportunity at this moment to be the first state to really reckon with the role race and racism have played and continued to play in this country. That history includes all of our stories. Let's not waste this opportunity in an attempt to not rock the boat and to not address our fears.

I look forward to taking advantage of this exciting opportunity with you.

Thank you for your time.

Hillary Bridges