

Submission of Public Testimony

To: The Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

Re: HB7082

Dear Members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Deborah L Brody. I am a retired RN and educator, originally from Newtown, CT, and currently living in Southbury, CT. I support HB 7082 with the amendments advanced by Students for Educational Justice.

This bill is important to me because I missed out on African American Studies throughout the 12 years of my public school education, and I wish that I hadn't. In a school where all of the teachers, and nearly all of the students, were white, I had no opportunity to encounter history or current events from a perspective other than that of the white experience. This was also true for my children growing up a generation later. Even though a broader understanding may be available later in life, it is harder to integrate, harder to identify with, when one hasn't encountered it as part of the MAINSTREAM education one received growing up. Imagine generation after generation of white people like myself, growing up with such a shuttered understanding of the world. Imagine generation after generation of people of color, growing up robbed of the vital mirroring and validation that their white peers are bathed in by the white curriculum.

To my own experience, I would like to add what the news tells us -- of the school-to-prison pipeline for black and brown children, of the abusive policing of black girls' bodies and hair and black boys' behavior, and of the hugely disproportionate alacrity and severity with which black and brown children are punished for minor infractions that go mildly reprimanded in white children. This unforgivable behavior among educators and administrators is in part normalized by a curriculum that fails to teach history except in reference to the white perspective.

In particular, I wish to advocate in the strongest terms for the amendments mandating the History of Race and the History of Racism in the United States as a part of the curriculum. This is where the rubber meets the road, where all of us have the opportunity to confront all sides of our history, to understand our place in that history, and to be able to approach race relations and personal relations in a context of reality, instead of myth.

In order to teach history of race and racism, it is vital that more teachers of color be hired, and that current teachers be trained both in critical race theory, and in the social and racial experiences of their black and brown students. Only then will they be able to teach with a fully contexted understanding. This same sensitivity is equally necessary among school administrators, and so I call for racial bias training to be extended throughout the system, not merely to teachers.

The Students for Educational Justice have prepared a [document](#) detailing the language they wish to see in the bill, and I wish to add my voice to theirs, calling for these amendments. It is vital that all students learn:

1. That African American history = American history
2. The history of the creation of the concepts of “race,” whiteness, and anti-Blackness
3. The role racism played in the formation of the United States
4. About their ethnicities and countries of origin, and how their ethnicities came to fit in the American conception of race

The amendments recommended by SEJ will help us to ensure that the delivery of the content is effective, high-quality, and consistent with the vision of the law and the needs of our young people.

Thank you for your time,

Deborah L. Brody, BA, MA, RN, BSN