Edward Brown III

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<u>Introduction speech for Raised Bill 7082 testimonial</u>

My name is Edward Brown III, and I am Program Director of the Youth Leadership Academy, which Hartford Communities That Care initiated 20 years ago. Today we have several youth leaders here to testify on Raised Bill Number 7082, and I am proud to be part of their ongoing work, Raising Youth Voices. There are a lot of questions to be asked.

Why African American studies? Why not study ALL people? Why separate African Americans? It's a common dilemma among historians of the *African American Experience*. How do you tell the story of a people who have been apart from, but an integral part of AMERICA?

American History cannot be understood apart from the African American experience. There is no distinct line between African American culture and American mainstream culture. You can't have one without the other. We need to engage in civil discourse about race and racism in this country.

How does the context of race inform where we came from, and where we are today? We can only understand this by studying the economic, social and political context of the lived experience of African Americans in the past and in the present.

Our history is multi-faceted; too often we emphasize the horrors of slavery, segregation, racism, disenfranchisement, and inequality; at the expense of overlooking the resilience, creativity, courage, charismatic leadership, collective resistance, strength, FAITH and perseverance that is woven into the African American experience. We can't understand AMERICA without understanding the role of AFRICAN AMERICANS.

These studies should not be separate but EQUAL in all curriculum-based practices of learning in the public school system. I have youth here with me today who will testify and in hopes, leave you with valuable opinions to help ensure this bill is passed and becomes a law for the better understanding of the *African American Experience* and how important it is to be included in our public school education system.