



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Education Committee Public Hearing – March 6, 2019

CHRO Testimony Regarding HB 7082, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum and HB 7083, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Tanya Hughes and I am the Executive Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Beside me is Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 7082 and HB 7083.

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) supports House Bills 7082 and 7083, which add African American Studies and Puerto Rican and Latino Studies to the required curriculum in Connecticut's schools. CHRO is particularly interested in this issue because, as the state agency that receives and investigates charges of discrimination (including school bullying because of one's protected status), working to eliminate discrimination in schools will hopefully eliminate discrimination in other places.

Sixteen (16) percent of Connecticut residents are currently Hispanic and twelve (12) percent are African-American/Black.¹ Hispanic and African-American/Black people have lived in this country long before its independence and their history is our history. Unfortunately, schools and the textbooks used frequently focus on history that excludes the contributions of members of minority groups. While there is the requisite acknowledgement of "Black History Month" in February and "Women's History Month" in March, the history of African-American/Black and Hispanic people is frequently seen as separate and not a significant part of US and Connecticut history. The purpose of adding these categories to the curriculum in particular allows all of the students to see these and other frequently marginalized and ignored groups of people as participants in our state and country throughout its history – part of America.

Connecticut already has a one of the largest achievement gaps in academic performance based on race². While poverty and segregation are partly to blame, other studies point to school environment that is not culturally friendly.³ In other words, when students do not see themselves and their cultures as participants in the world that they live in, they are less engaged. Also, by not teaching the history of all of the various groups that make up the American culture, other students do not know and value those contributions. This then leads to marginalization of these cultures, which follows students outside of school and into the work environment.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ct>

² <https://ctmirror.org/2017/07/14/test-results-stubborn-achievement-gaps-unchanged/>

³ <http://www.nea.org/home/17413.htm>

Recent legislation⁴ has added Holocaust and genocide studies to the curriculum, marking these as important areas of knowledge for our students. African-American Studies, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies as well as studies of the cultures of all of the Connecticut students should be a part of school curriculum as well.

We appreciate the opportunity to support testimony in favor of HB 7082 and HB 7083 and urge the committee to support these important bills.

⁴ P.A. 18-24