

## House Bill 7082 an Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American History in the Public School Curriculum.

To members of the committee,

Having been an educator for the last 40 years I feel that I can give some perspective on the need for mandating that Black History be taught in the public schools. As a teacher of students with special needs I have been given an opportunity to teach and collaborate with other teachers on lessons and activities to impart not just information and ideas but moral and societal values. Again as a special educator my goal for many if not most of my students has been one of inclusion. One in which they have a right to be a part of the regular curriculum so that they as other will leave high school with skills, ideas, and values that will allow them to be informed citizens and positive contributors to society.

More apparent are learning the skills of appreciating literature and the arts, reading critically, expressing oneself orally and in writing, and being able to analyze and apply concepts in math and science. Less apparent, but perhaps no less important, is learning and appreciating different cultures, religions, and experiences of people around the world to increase tolerance, understanding and context for being able to critically analyze current issues and topics in our society and world.

As we look back on Black History month we can celebrate the accomplishments of people who influenced and are continuing to influence American society in positive ways. Older politicians like John Lewis and newer ones like Stacy Abrahms who have fought for, and are continuing to fight, for equal rights in voting, healthcare, and employment. In our own state we see the election the first African American from Connecticut of Jahanna Hayes, to Congress as a triumph of her own hard work and determination and her ability to garner the trust and confidence of her constituents.

However we have also seen troubling events including past evidence of elected officials dressing in blackface, high school and college students doing the same, and continued instances of young, mostly male, and unarmed black men being shot and our criminal justice system failing to hold those guilty reasonably accountable. We are living in a time of politics fueled by a president who has avowed a policy that provokes fear and anger, much of it directed at people of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community.

Some will say that African Americans are better off today that 50 or so years ago, before the civil rights movement won critical victories in voting rights, education, and employment. People will point to the election of President Obama as our nation's "triumph over race". Some would like us to believe that we live in a color-blind society. The reality is far from this.

Bryan Stevenson, the noted attorney who has represented poor people, the wrongly condemned and those trapped in our criminal justice system, is also the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. Its goal is to end mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States and to challenge racial and economic injustice. One of the ideas that he has given credence to is the notion that in the epic battle of our country, the Civil War, it may have been the North that won the war, but the South won the narrative. In essence the false narrative that the South used to justify slavery racial differences and white supremacy was never repudiated. In fact slavery never ended it just evolved into other forms of oppression. The narrative never was abolished.

African-American history must be taught in public schools because America has never required itself to confront and did not have to repent for the sins of slavery lynching and segregation. If you look in Germany there are markers in cities and towns that show where Jewish families were abducted and killed. They created a Holocaust Museum for the people of their country and the world to see. In Rwanda it is required that their citizens hear about the genocide that happened there. In South Africa there is an Apartheid Museum that educates people about apartheid and schools must teach these lessons.

In many cases our nation's silence and unwillingness to show repentance is like a cloud that descends over our nation. Even though many Americans did not participate in these atrocities and crimes we cannot escape the reality that by not confronting these ills, we as a nation have not been honest. This lack of trust is what has kept our country apart.

By requiring that schools adopt a curriculum that includes relevant and substantive lessons and activities that create analysis, discussion, and reflection we as a state and society are affording our children an opportunity to break down myths, untruths, and fallacies that our country has never come to terms with.

Black history is American history and the contributions of African Americans in the struggle to make our country a more perfect union need to be recognized. In addition our many of our political leaders, the judicial and criminal justice systems need to make amends and ensure that past mistakes are admitted to and a commitment made to ensure a path forward that makes justice a priority is heeded to. The stigma and burden that people of color are forced to carry around, that they are presumed guilty and dangerous, need to be denounced and condemned. A thorough examination of history and its narrative will help clarify this. I implore the legislature to consider a recommendation to allow school districts to implement such a curriculum would be a step in the process that will mean fairness and justice for our citizenry in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

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