

Education Committee Hearing
H.B. 7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public
School Curriculum
Wednesday, March 6th, 2019

Dear Rep. Sanchez, Sen. McCrory and esteemed members of the Education Committee,

My name is Aliyah Henry and I am an MSW student at UConn School of Social Work. I am also Chair of the student run group, Students Against Mass Incarceration at the school and an East Hartford resident. I am in support of H.B. 7082 with the Students for Educational Justice's amendments.

My Experience

My parents are from the beautiful island of Jamaica and I grew up in East Hartford for the majority of my life. Because of this, I was fortunate enough to be a part of an incredibly diverse student body with classmates of all races and ethnic backgrounds. However, the curriculum did not reflect the diversity that I was surrounded by. It felt like there was a deep separation between my life at home and my life in school. I was proud of my background but didn't feel like I could be this way in school. While I remained a relatively good student, I rarely felt like I wanted to participate, I was often late, and I did not perform to the best of my capabilities. I felt distrustful of the teachers because I felt like they didn't truly understand me, nor did they care to understand. While I was able to graduate and succeed, I imagine that many of my classmates may have struggled in the same manner and were not able to succeed as a result.

I am also an aunt and believe my 10 year old nephew and 7 year old niece deserve to have the opportunity to receive an education that is relevant to them. I would not want them to go through the same experience as I did where I felt misunderstood and uncared for. It also did not benefit my classmates, whether they were white or non-white, because they did not gain any understanding of how to appreciate other cultures. Disrespect towards others' backgrounds was common throughout my K-12 experience even though I attended relatively diverse schools.

Pitfalls in Our Education System

It is the duty of a school to educate students fairly which includes going into the more shameful parts of our history and current day issues. Our country was built on the backs of Black people and other people of color. It is also made up of people from other countries of all races, so people of color are not the "other". Without coming to terms with that, we will not be able to move forward as a state and country and it is imperative that our future generations are prepared to confront these issues.

It is also important to take note of how Black and Hispanic students are funneled through the school to prison pipeline. Black children are 4 time more likely than white children to be arrested in Connecticut schools. It begins even in preschool with 48% of preschool children who are suspended more than once being Black. Implementing a curriculum that recognizes their cultural backgrounds can deter from this. Giving these students the chance to learn how valuable their race is could inspire them to achieve.

Recommendations by SEJ

Students for Educational Justice are a group of advocates located in New Haven. Their recommendations are as follows:

- Require The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States in the CT curriculum
- Required racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators
- The creation of a curriculum-building Committee within the State Department of Education that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory, and students.

I also feel that it is important to hire more diverse faculty members.

What This Will Add

Students will be afforded the opportunity to learn about the history of the creation of the concepts of “race,” whiteness, and anti-Blackness. They will also learn about the role racism played in the formation of the United States, their ethnicities and countries of origin, and how their ethnicities came to fit in the American conception of race.

These amendments will help us ensure that the delivery of the content is effective, high-quality, and consistent with the vision of the law and the needs of our constituents. It is important to ensure that the bill is implemented with purpose if it is written into law so that it will not fall flat.

Thank you for reading my testimony and I *strongly* encourage you to support this bill.

Aliyah Henry

UConn School of Social Work, MSW Student

Students Against Mass Incarceration, Chair