

***Testimony***

***HB 7082***

***An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum***

***Submitted by Ross Hollander***

***March 6, 2019***

Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum. A special recognition is extended to Representative Bobby Gibson of the 15<sup>th</sup> Legislative District, my home district, as the primary sponsor of this Bill.

As I read the information regarding this Bill, I must confess, I was surprised to learn that African-American Studies was not a requirement in the public schools. When I think about the unique experiences of African-Americans in the history of the United States, I believe it is imperative that we never forget the incredible courage African-Americans have shown in gaining respect and equality in America. By requiring a class such as this we recognize that we need to redouble our efforts to celebrate the differences African-Americans bring to our communities. Our democracy depends on understanding the contributions racially different people have made to our lives.

As most of you likely know, I bring the perspective of a small businessman who depends on a workforce who supports, celebrates, and understands differences among and between those who work in our company. I recognize the challenge in the workforce. And I also recognize that a workforce educated as to the unique history of African-Americans will lead to a more cohesive work environment and enhanced economy.

In a recent business publication highlighted the advantages of a diverse workforce. The list of advantages the respondents reported is extensive. The results reported that diversity increased

productivity, creativity, profits, employee engagement, reduced turnover, improved insight into different perspectives, and included a broader range of skills.

In an era of globalization and technology, it is imperative that companies embrace the concept of a diverse workforce. Workers exposed to a variety of perspectives become better contributors in the work environment and their communities. Given the challenges of our political world today, it's obvious we have everything to gain by increasing the knowledge of our students in the area of African-American studies.

In the recent Pew Research Center's 2016 report "The State of American Jobs," several workplace trends tested in the survey are viewed more positively than negatively by the public. Three in ten surveyed say that a growing emphasis on workplace diversity and women in the workplace have helped them personally in their job and career. Complementing, and not surprising, the survey result is that almost half of African-Americans and Hispanics surveyed state that the diversity in the workplace has helped their job and career.

I am not here to say that a course on African-American history will address all the ills of our democracy or the workplace. I am here to say that we must explore all options to this challenge. A course such as is proposed by Representative Gibson can help provide an essential foundation toward our effort to support and understand the societal contributions of the African-American experience and promote tolerance. Our citizenry has a moral mandate to do so. I urge you to support HB 7082 and vote for its passage.

Thank you,

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