

Testimony Supporting HB 7082
An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the
Public-School Curriculum

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Good Afternoon/Evening Senator Douglas McCrory, Representative Robert Sanchez, and esteemed members of the Education Committee.

Thank you for taking the time out to hear my testimony in support of HB 7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum. My name is Bree'Ana Johnson and I am a second year MSW Policy Practice student at the University of Connecticut. As well as, a constituent of State Representative Brandon McGee's district and guardian of an African American pupil.

African-American Studies, commonly offered as an elective, in comparison to the mandated American History courses, demonstrates the inequity and other-than depiction that exist in our schools, as well as, throughout the State of Connecticut. I am in support of HB 7082, because it is impossible to accurately describe America's foundation, without including the African-American component, which had a huge impact in shaping American society and culture. **The omittance of African-American studies throughout public-school curriculum is perilous to the overall development and structure of our nation.** I know that without this component in public school curricula there will be a continuum to the oppression of Black and Brown people in America.

Much of our understanding of historical contributions by African-Americans derives from lessons we learn as adults. And for many students, their exposure to black history is often condensed to a month. **This approach is a disservice to our youth, as it in many ways perpetuates the system of "otherness" that permeates the experiences of black people.** Additionally, this approach suggests that the contributions, culture, oppression, and achievements of African-Americans are not fit to be a part of day-to-day academics.

African-American Studies has been a controversial topic for many years. **However, based upon a study conducted by Stanford University examining the impact of an ethnic-studies curriculum for struggling ninth-grade students, data shows that students enrolled in this elective, exceled in class (Donald, 2016).** Through these electives, African-American students are able to build on their concepts of community by understanding the socioeconomic struggles throughout the State. The provision of studies about the African-American population, outside of the context of oppression, helps students to become aware of the inequalities that exist in the political, social, and academic realm. While also showing students the relationship between the oppressive caste systems developed during slavery and trace its development to 2019. As parents and guardians, educators, and legislators we must address this oversight, and make it our duty to create a space that welcomes creativity and elicit change-agents to positively impact future generations.

While currently raising my 13 year old brother, I am very cognizant of the risks that exist for him in our current society. I do my best to educate him about his familial history, heritage, and culture, but I am a firm believer that he needs to receive this comprehensive knowledge within the school

environment to understand how history has led to his current reality. And I believe depriving him of this knowledge sets him up to fail.

In a nation where we still celebrate many African-American firsts, I believe it is essential for our school systems to explain the reason behind this excitement. As black students are not taught about the ways in which black people rebelled, resisted, and persevered to love and respect in spite of the vile treatment they faced, they are not provided with an accurate depiction of where they came from and who they can become. **As we work aimlessly to close the academic gaps, we must also challenge the prevailing narrative of black inferiority by closing cultural gaps as well, which begins with the passing of HB 7082.**

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify in support of HB 7082 in efforts to ensure the state instills the values of increased equality and equity in the provision of this much needed resource and overall growth in inclusion of African-American studies and diversity among the developers and teachers of this curriculum.

I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at breeana.johnson@uconn.edu.

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References

Donald, Brook. (2016). Stanford Study Suggests Academic Benefits to Ethnic Studies Courses. Stanford News. Retrieved from: <https://news.stanford.edu/2016/01/12/ethnic-studies-benefits-011216/>