

Dear Members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Mia, I am a student at Metropolitan Business Academy from Ansonia and I am a member of SEJ. I support Bill 7082 with SEJ's amendments. This bill is important to me because it should be a given that different groups in American society learn about their history and why things today are the way they are.

Ansonia, Connecticut, where I grew up, wasn't diverse. Its people lived in a bubble—and I, too was raised within its confines. The belief that we lived in a 'post-racial' society was central to that bubble. The idea that racism did not exist left an impression on me. Even when confronted with facts that proves its existence, I denied it. My understanding of racism was defined strictly by a black person being called the 'N-word'. It didn't happen to me, so I was convinced I had never experienced racism. I never self-identified as black during those years, this highlights an internalized racism that I only became aware of in my adolescence. The main thing I focused on was getting teased for my glasses, my over-enthusiastic participation in class, and my perfectionism. So I didn't have friends. Looking back on it now, I think implicit racism played a part in my isolation. But I didn't have the language to express that back then.

This lack of belonging led me to apply to the New Haven high schools. One school, Metropolitan Business Academy, offered an Academy of Law and Political Science, and I was hooked. My interest in history stemmed from my social studies teacher, who said that "history is law." I spent hours looking through books and videos, learning about American heroes, both white and black. Now, I thought I could learn about the criminal justice system and learn how to make things equal and fair for all people.

During my junior year of high school, I helped build Students for Educational Justice (SEJ), a grassroots organization dedicated to combating inequities in the U.S. educational system. Our objective is to ensure that the experiences of those whose voices have been historically silenced (for example, people of color) are not only recognized and heard but understood as fundamental to the foundation and structure of the United States as a whole. We intend to achieve this by making "A History of Race and Racism in The United States" an elective course in high schools around CT. After a year working in this organization, I earned a position on SEJ's Leadership Team. Now, as a senior in high school, I'm SEJ's Lead Organizer, working with other youth dedicated to fighting systemic injustice. I engage young people in issues affecting them, primarily through a racial justice lens. I meet with and cultivate leadership in and with young people of color, showing them that they have the capacity and the power to make their community a better place. I began to see that there's an issue with majority-white teachers teaching students of color, and not being trained or informed on how to interact with students of color, like myself. And that lack of knowledge led to friends of mine not wanting to come to class, not wanting to go to school, and cutting class. And then they would wind up falling behind, and their school careers negatively impacted. It was a cycle. A cycle that never seemed to end.

By adding "A History Of Race And Racism" to bill 7082, we will, and in particular, young people, will have the vocabulary and the background needed to fully understand the society at large, that they're growing up in. As a part of the curriculum, we will all be able to recognize the role race has played in the formation of the United States and how decisions made in the past about race largely inform the way we live today. In addition, we will not be able to adequately dismantle the racist system we live in unless we have a clear understanding of how race works and how it has shifted over time. Nobody can be anti-racists unless we gain a deep knowledge about it. I can't be fully safe in the society I live in, where black women are constantly scrutinized, sexualized, and dehumanized, until I have more people who believe in me and support me, and the first steps are to require The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States in the CT curriculum and require racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators, people who play a fundamental role in the development of young people, and shape how they view the world.

Thank you for your time,

*Mia Joseph*