

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

My name is Elizabeth Kinnane-Smith. I am from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and I am currently working for Students for Educational Justice in New Haven, Connecticut.

Growing up Black, I rarely felt that my history was discussed in school, save during the month of February. Even then, we were taught a sugar coated version of this history centered around a smooth transition from a violent and racist society to the peaceful and equitable one that we were supposedly living. We never learned about Black people and the trials we face in today's world. I didn't learn why black people are being killed by the police. I didn't learn why the neighborhoods in my city are still segregated. I didn't learn why jail are disproportionately filled with people who look like me. My teachers and the educational system I grew up in seemed to think that not addressing the problem would make it disappear. Ignoring the racism that exists today does not make it go away. It allows it to fester and grow and take new and dangerous forms.

In high school I was thrilled to learn that I could elect to take a course called African American History, but the one dimensional retelling of a history full of pain and also pride didn't satisfy my craving to know how our country became what it is today. On my own, I began to learn that this history was not black and white (literally and figuratively speaking). This is a country is full of people from all corners of the world. Some were here before this country was founded, some were stolen to be brought here, some were forced to flee here, others came voluntarily. We need to learn about how this country has responded each of these peoples and how these peoples have taken part in shaping our country. This is the history of race and the history of racism are central to the history of the United States, and we need to learn them as such. We need to learn the good and the bad. We need to learn the whole truth.

I am here along with Connecticut public school students who are asking for their histories to be told, for the present conditions of their lives to be examined, I am here with students who are asking to be recognized and acknowledged in their classrooms. They have done amazing work to rally behind this bill with these three amendments and in doing so have shown their commitment to their education and the education of future students of Connecticut. I am here to ask you to hear them, to listen to them, and to realize their dreams.

Thank you for your time,

Elizabeth Kinnane-Smith