

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

My name is Benie N'sumbu, I am a student at Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in New Haven and I am a member of SEJ. I support Bill7082 with SEJ's amendments. This bill is important to me because it directly hits at the core of the racial disparities in America. My family and I immigrated to the U.S. from the Democratic Republic of Congo when I was 5 years old so I've been in the American educational system for most of my life. It wasn't until my sophomore year of high school that I realized how neglectful I had been towards my own culture. It was like the more American I became the less African I was and I felt like I couldn't be both. Throughout elementary and middle school I endured accusations from my classmates, most of whom were Black, that I acted White. The assertion being that since I was a quiet, high achieving student, and didn't speak African American Vernacular English I could only be described as trying to be White. This resulted in years of internalized racism that I am still working on dismantling to this day.

I am lucky to have attended such an accepting school with qualified history teachers who weren't afraid to dig deeper into the stories we read in our textbooks. It was through reading the articles Ida B. Wells wrote, studying Toussaint Louverture, and watching documentaries of Nat Turner's rebellion in U.S. History Honors that I realized just how resilient my people were. But that was just the beginning. If there's anything that supplied me with the context and vocabulary I needed to describe what I was feeling and seeing in America it would be Twitter, SEJ, and other organizations that focus on racial justice work. Without them I wouldn't have been able to identify the lack of content regarding race and racism in America in our schools. But I am the exception. I have heard the horrific stories of teachers refusing to teach about race and racism because they don't feel comfortable and I have heard the annoyed tones of my peers as they explained that once again, for Black History Month their school thought it fitting to only spit fun facts at students about Black Americans who have achieved great things.

This is exactly why our schools need HB7082. Students want more than fun facts and teachers need more training so that they can teach the material we're giving them properly. I have participated in many anti-racism trainings, and I believe requiring such training can help to ensure that the courses are effective, high-quality, and taught consistently with the vision of the law and the needs of our constituents. To me the passing of this bill would ensure that my 8 year old brother will grow up with an education that teaches the true stories of his people, but also equip him with a deep and meaningful understanding of how race was conceptualized and why/how Black people and other people of color continue to be negative affected by this.

The amendments we have suggested are important because they make it necessary for the social studies curriculum to include content on The History of Race and Racism in the United States and they ensure that its implementation is effective by requiring teachers to attend racial bias trainings and establishing a committee of diverse community members.

Without this bill this country will continue to go in an oppressive cycle where Black and Brown people are robbed of their histories, White Americans are coddled and shielded from the harm their ancestors caused, and everyone remains ignorant about the reason why certain things are the way they are. Things have to change and it starts with this bill being passed. Thank you.