

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

My name is Jessica Powell. I am an Assistant Professor of Education at Southern Connecticut State University and a mother a young children in Hamden Public Schools. **I support Bill 7082 with SEJ's amendments.** I believe it is crucial for all children to learn about race, racism, and the histories of people of color, particular African Americans. African American history *is* our nation's history, not something that should be separated into a "Black History Month" or an elective course. Every child has the right to learn these histories and to work together to discover ways to undo racism in our lives, communities, and society.

I am a white teacher educator, former first grade teacher, and mother of two children. I believe that harm is done to both white children and to children of color when they aren't given an opportunity to explore issues that matter to them and to learn about how race and racism impacts their lives. Research in psychology and sociology has demonstrated that children learn our social constructions of race by age 4 or 5. This means that children are absorbing messages around race and racism before they even reach kindergarten. If we want the next generation to be able to solve problems in their communities and undo the racism that continues to show its legacy in our intuitions and policies, then we **MUST** help youth understand our histories and grapple with these difficult truths.

Walter Gilliam, a scholar at Yale University, has confirmed that teachers hold implicit bias around race; these unconscious beliefs impact that way teachers respond to children of color in the classroom. I believe that SEJ's amendment suggesting teachers be required to engage anti-bias/anti-racist trainings is critical. This ongoing professional development must be paired with changes in the curriculum so that teachers feel empowered and prepared to engage in this important work in their classrooms.

Scholars of education have been calling for these changes for decades. At SCSU, we are explicitly preparing teachers to engage curricula that draw on multiple perspectives, engage children's lived experiences, and challenge systemic racism and bias. We are preparing our future teachers to do this work from pre-k through grade 12. However, our students are coming to us at SCSU having NEVER discussed issues around racism in our contemporary lives and society. Generally, our students reflect on how their K-12 education only addressed African American cultures and histories during Black History Month or a single isolated multicultural lesson. Anti-racist and anti-bias curriculum must be integrated into the life of the everyday classroom for all children if it is to be truly meaningful. If this bill passes and children move through their schooling career developing these understandings gradually, we will have a head start in preparing the next generation of teachers to engage in culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching.

I support the amendments put forward by Students for Educational Justice:

1. The bill to require The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States in the CT curriculum
2. Required racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators
3. the creation of a curriculum-building Committee within the State Dept of Ed that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory, and students

[SEJ's Suggested Bill Amendments](#)

Why include The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States?

Including this additional content will help students learn:

1. African American history = American history
2. The history of the creation of the concepts of “race,” whiteness, and anti-Blackness
3. The role racism played in the formation of the United States
4. about their ethnicities and countries of origin, and how their ethnicities came to fit in the American conception of race

AND will help us ensure that the delivery of the content is effective, high-quality, and consistent with the vision of the law and the needs of our constituents.

Thank you for your time,

Jessica Powell, Ph.D.
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