

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

My name is Dr. Karl P. Stofko. I am the East Haddam Municipal Historian, a member of the Connecticut Freedom Trail Committee and chairman of the Annual Venture Smith (1729-1805) Day Celebrations at First Church Cemetery in East Haddam. I support Bill 7082 with SEJ's amendments. This bill is important to me because, after researching Venture Smith's life and family since 1972, I have found it almost impossible over recent years to involve the Middle School and High School administrations and teachers in the inclusion of early African American history. It seems that any such history prior to the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War is mentioned in the history curriculum only briefly in one class lecture. The fact that slavery started here in New England as early as the 1600s, appears irrelevant to them. Venture Smith's amazing struggle for freedom and success in our white dominated history should be emphasized since Venture's autobiographical narrative, written in 1798, clearly shows that the long held theory that Africans should be kept ignorant of reading, writing and arithmetic was a failure and that Venture proved that Africans were equal to and not inferior to Caucasian Americans. Today it is crucial that African Americans and all other Americans understand that through a comprehensive knowledge of African American History, they can achieve the same degree of success by working together as equals and not against each other.

Thank you for your time,

Karl Peter Stofko