

Dear Sen. McCrory, Sen. Sanchez, Ranking Members, Vice-Chairs, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Lisa Thomas, I have taught in our CT public schools for 33 years and I am writing in support of HB7082, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum.

This year's CT NAACP poster of the 100 Most Influential Blacks in Connecticut hangs in my grades 3 - 5 classroom. Every day, I find students standing before that poster mesmerized by the talent in front of them, reflecting them, affirming them. Often it takes 2 or 3 attempts to get them to hear me speaking to them as they study the names and faces. My students yearn for learning about their past, present and future. They want to know more than the basic tidbits that are at times sprinkled throughout the curriculum and typically only surface during Black History Month or during introduction of pre-1960s U.S. History. Yet, that hunger is not being sated. African American history is an integral part of who our country is today and of how the United States is moving into the future. Connecticut students' access to African American history should be guaranteed from one school district to the next. Additionally, African American history must be a meaningful part of students' learning not just in high school, but starting in the primary grades. It should be seen as an integral part of the fabric of our country, not as an "add on" to our history.

Reading the language of the bill, it appears that this curriculum requirement can be met with existing resources from within and without districts, as well as through donated time, services and materials thus creating minimal fiscal impact:

In developing and implementing the African-American studies curriculum, the board may utilize existing and appropriate public or private materials, personnel and other resources, including the curriculum materials made available by the State Board of Education pursuant to subsection (d) of said section 10-16b . . . (b) A local or regional board of education may accept gifts, grants and donations, including in-kind donations, designated for the development and implementation of the African-American studies

In closing, I'd like to leave you with words from two of my 5th graders:

If You Don't Tell Me

If you don't tell me my history,
how will I ever know?

If you don't tell me my history,
how will I ever grow?

If you don't tell me my history,

I will believe in what others bestow.
If you don't tell me my history,
how will I ever see
what God can do for his people
and what God can do for me?

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By: Auboni

Black

What do you know about black?
What do you know about the beauty of my skin?
Well if you don't know a thing
Let me give you some inspiring.

Black people were enslaved
And forced to do so many things
Slaves were not allowed an education
And that was followed by segregation
Then we heard the voice
of Martin Luther King
He stood up for us and for our rights.
Black people had to give up their seat
if the white people wanted it
they got it

Do you have feelings when you hear people
talking about your skin color?
If you have a bad feeling
Stand for your rights

If you believe in yourself
Stand for your rights
If you see mean graffiti
Wipe it away

What do you know about black?
What do you know about the beauty of my skin?
I have the power of my soul
The power of my heart
And you can't break my heart
and you can't break my soul
because I have power in me.
My soul has power and courage
It will run free!

By: Shanae

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of HB7082.

Respectfully,

Lisa Thomas
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