

Testimony

HB7082- Kierra

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

My name is Kierra Turnbull, I am a former student of Hill Regional Career High School from New Haven. I am the Communications Coordinator for Students for Educational Justice. I am here to support HB7082: An Act Concerning African American Studies and I strongly recommend the Amendments put forward by my friends and colleagues. This bill, along with the amendments is important to me because I certainly did not receive an adequate education regarding Black American studies, and no education whatsoever concerning the history of race or racism in the United States. I had to wait until I got to college in order to receive any substantial education on the aforementioned topics.

I moved to Connecticut at an early age and began attending elementary school. From then, to my departure from High School, I learned the same lessons about the same time periods in history and the same people. I learned that Blackness began with slavery, somewhere in the middle there was a war, then there was Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, which, in turn, led to complete liberation – and that’s all there was to be told. I did not learn, in depth, about any of the atrocities inflicted on People of Color in America, aside from slavery and violence during sit-ins. The history of Indigenous peoples in America was glossed over with a colored lens that insinuated that colonists and Natives got along, with few disagreements. I learned nothing of the West Indian Americans, or Latinx Americans plight in the U.S., or about U.S. hegemony in other countries.

I believe that SEJ’s Amendments are important to this bill, because it would encompass so many more peoples that have immigrated to America and have had difficulty due to systemic prejudices. Having teachers who had participated in mandatory anti-racism trainings teach me about race and racism in America would have been an integral part of my learning. I would have been more prepared for college at a predominantly white institution, and I would have been privy to the inner-workings of society early on. If this had been implemented while I was in school, I may have never had teachers make insensitive cultural jokes or try to teach me that colonization was benevolent. I would have understood how poor communities filled with people of color were affected by governmental policies of benign neglect. However, I do think about the few teachers that I had that made efforts to touch on these subjects in class, and talk more with me personally about things that they felt they could not say in the classroom. These bills would not only make it mandatory for teachers to teach this content, but it would take away the stigma surrounding the idea that race or racism are untouchable topics that get people in trouble if spoken about.

Thank you for your time,

Kierra