

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

My name is Sebastian Ward, I am a student at New Haven Academy from New Haven and I am a member of SEJ. I support Bill7082 with SEJ's amendments. I believe the intentions of the bill are certainly in the right place, and the amendments SEJ has provided are ultimately necessary for the efficacy of the bill.

Growing up, my mother has always worked hard to ensure I was doing as much learning as I could outside of school. She helped me learn to read before I reached kindergarten. She would always sit down and work with me out of textbooks she bought from Lakeshore Learning Center, and sign me up for every academic extra-curricular program for 6-year-olds New Haven could offer. Needless to say, I despised my mother from ages 5 until 11. However, this allowed me to excel in school, so I am no longer angry with her.

While this could be a testimony talking about how awesome my mom is, that would not fit the context of this bill. The reason I brought this up is to share one of my favorite of my mother's lessons: Black History. For as long as I could remember, my mother watched documentaries of prominent black leaders with me, and purchase books of many more for me. I happily immersed myself in the biographies of Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B DuBois, Malcolm X, Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, and so many more. I even paid attention to almost half of Obama's Inauguration when I was 5. At the time, I couldn't really fathom how monumental it was. To me, there were many famous African-American leaders who have done great things, so why did I have to watch another one stand and talk for 80 minutes?

I continued reading more and more about my ancestors throughout elementary school. It was the only thing my mom made me do that didn't feel like a chore. However, I only first started noticing the lack of their presence in my 5th-grade history class, who the only African-American we learned about was Crispus Attucks, the first guy to get shot in the revolutionary war. Isn't it crazy to think that black men were getting shot by cops in America before America was even a country? We didn't even get a Black History Month lesson that year. From then, it became more and more apparent to me the lack of knowledge people had about Black History. The most poignant example of this was 7th grade when the teacher mentioned Harriet Tubman and one of my classmates asked if she was the woman who got arrested for riding a bus. This wouldn't have upset me as much if this particular student wasn't the class history buff who knew everything there was to know about the Vietnam War.

The point I am trying to make is that people simply do not know Black History, despite it being intrinsically attached to the history of everyone else. The net benefit of this passing will be immeasurable. Black students all over the state will feel far more represented in their school, ultimately leading to their achievement. The amount of bigotry directed toward African-Americans will be greatly mitigated once people know how much we have contributed to society. Most importantly, however, white kids in 7th-grade history classes will know Claudette Colvin was actually the first one who got arrested on the bus. I know you all thought I would say Rosa Parks.

Thank you for your time,
Sebastian Ward