

FROM: Minister Lisa White-Smith

DATE: March 6, 2019

RE: House Bill 7082

Dear State Representative Bobby Gibson and other members of the House,

I write this letter today in support of House Bill 7082. Unfortunately, due to my schedule I am unable to be with you in person to offer said testimony. However, please accept the following statement from me:

I was born and raised in CT. I grew up in Hartford and matriculated in the Bloomfield school system. I am a proud graduate of Bloomfield High class of '86. I then graduated from the University of Connecticut with a BA in Communication Sciences and a MSW from UCONN School of Social Work. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, sister, daughter, minister, and a friend to the community to which I live in and serve. I've lived in this community all of my life and raised my family here as well.

I would like to offer my experience growing up as a person of color in that era in Hartford/Bloomfield. When my family relocated to Bloomfield, I was about 8 years old. At that time, there was little to no families of color in the town as Bloomfield was a predominantly Jewish town/community. As I matriculated from elementary through high school, there was little to no emphasis on my ancestors and/or current events involving the accomplishments of Black Americans or Black people in any school curriculum. I remember my high school textbook only contained a small paragraph, if that, about Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. I recall wondering way back then, in the 1980's, why? Why was there no interest in a man whose social movement helped every social and economic group in the United States to prosper? Why couldn't I sit in the classroom and learn about MY people? Sadly enough, that question went unanswered even up until the day of graduation from Bloomfield High School.

So, where did I learn about me? Well, I was blessed to have a family who valued the importance of Black history so my education started in my home. My father would fondly tell me as a lad those things there were never found in a textbook or even outlined in one (1) history lesson in school. The next place I learned about Me was at church. Each year, my Baptist church would ensure that students knew about our roots. Black History celebration was more than the month of February, Black History was truly a celebration of US! As a lad, my church would put on grand plays, musicals and teach us about us. But I can remember thinking as a child, why is it that I go to school and learn about everyone else and not about Black Americans who built the infrastructure of this nation, whose inventions changed the tapestry of American's lives in medicine, engineering, our food supply, art, finances etc.

Why is it that not one school lesson was offered to me, in school, to talk about Black Wall Street, The Amistad, soldiers in War, operations that saved infant's lives, inventions that allow us to see (even when its dark), etc. Why was I left out of American history when in fact my ancestors were an integral part of American history in the past, present and will be in the future? It's important for our Black children and others to know the rich history and heritage of Black Americans as well as have an adequate knowledge of other countries and continents that are so entwined in my history as a Black Woman.

That is why I am supporting House Bill 7082. This bill is necessary for our children and families in Connecticut. The inclusion of African American studies in the public school curriculum is a great way to start really achieving racial equality in our State.

Finally, the Black National Anthem talks about we shall overcome some day....I submit the day is NOW!

Thank you for your time and consideration.