

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7082

AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

Title: IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

Vote Date: 3/25/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/6/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to include African-American history in the public school curriculum as our current curriculum does not give a full, comprehensive take on African-American history.

Substitute Language:

Section 2: Removes reference to African-American studies as part of social studies so that it can be a curriculum wide subject matter area.

Substitute language adds the below sections:

Section 3: Makes African-American studies a one-credit requirement for graduation, starting with the graduating class of 2023.

Section 4 & 5: Requires SDE, by July 1, 2020, to develop the one-credit African-American studies curriculum.

Section 6: Requires the State Board of Education, by July 1, 2020, to develop a model curriculum for grades K through 8 to include African American studies among various subject matter areas. Also requires SDE to provide assistance and training to implement the curriculum.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education: The Department is very supportive of this bill. They do, however, request that the date of implementation be extended to July 1, 2021 so that they can create a comprehensive set of guidelines. With the implementation of the Holocaust and genocide studies to the curriculum last year, they have found that it takes a significant amount of time to engage appropriate stakeholders with their social studies consultant to create guidelines they can recommend.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Derek Slap: Senator Slap supports this bill. He cites the Southern Poverty Law Center's study which states that slavery is often "mistaught, mischaracterized, sanitized and sentimentalized," in schools all over the country. Teaching a comprehensive and robust African-American studies, including contemporary racial tensions, is essential to ensuring justice and recognition.

Representative Bobby Gibson, 15th District: Representative strongly supports this bill, as he original introduced the bill as H.B. 5009. He speaks to the lack of representation of African-Americans in today's society and how that affects their identity. Providing a comprehensive African-American history in a public school curriculum allows students to learn of the trials, accomplishments and stories of people who look like them. All students will benefit from knowing African-American history as the more we know about one another, the more we can understand and love one another.

Representative Larry Butler, 72nd District: Representative Butler supports this bill as every student should have the opportunity to understand every influential culture in our society. He recommends the amendments as suggested by SEJ, listed below.

Representative Brandon McGee, 5th District: Representative McGee supports this bill. The sanitized and condensed version of African-American history taught in schools today give a sense of "post-racialism" that makes it difficult for students to recognize or fight against systemic racism that harms black people today. This bill allows educators to empower students with a true, comprehensive history.

Representative Pat Wilson Pheanious, 53rd District: Representative Wilson Pheanious supports this bill as our curriculum's limited scope of African-American history is detrimental to all students. This bill, which focuses on inclusion and true representation is an integral part to teaching true American History.

Amy Morin Bello, Mayor of Wethersfield: Mayor Bello supports this bill. She calls the lack of African-American studies in public school curriculum a gross oversight. In order to truly understand the struggles of our country we must learn the history of all its people.

Howard Sovronsky, President and CEO, Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford: Mr. Sovronsky strongly supports this bill. He believes we have an obligation to remember and re-tell our history as it helps our children understand their place in the world and the values that have guided us. Teaching of the African-American experience creates the opportunity to build bridges of understanding, tolerance and acceptance.

Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN: ConnCAN supports this bill as Connecticut has the opportunity to lead on this issue and this bill can improve curriculum equity and justice for Connecticut's students.

Connecticut Voices for Children: CT Voices for Children support this bill because it is important that children see their race and culture's past reflected in their curriculum so they know what is possible for themselves. When we only teach this history during its respective one month a year, we marginalize the experiences and contributions of people who shaped United States history.

Students for Educational Justice (SEJ): SEJ supports this bill but recommends the following amendments: 1) Include, "The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States" as required content in addition to "African American/Puerto Rican Studies". 2) Required racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators. 3) The creation of a Curriculum-Building and Oversight Commission within the DOE that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory and students.

Aliyah Henry, Students Against Mass Incarceration: Ms. Henry supports this bill. She says in her school experience, the curriculum did not represent the diversity of the student body. She often felt distrustful and uncared for, she felt a disconnect between her life at home and her life at school. This bill is important because it will afford students the opportunity to learn a comprehensive history and if students feel their school experience reflects their cultural backgrounds, it could deter them from the school to prison pipeline.

Shawn Brooks, Student: Mr. Brooks support this bill. He states U.S. history curriculum currently focuses on white exceptionalism and black inferiority and is concerned of the psychological detriment this has on black students. He believes this bill will empower all students to know the true history of our country.

Ayzel Morales, UCONN student & Hearing Youth Voices member: Ms. Morales supports these bills with the amendments proposed by SEJ. She speaks to the systemic racism and inequality and the difficulty in fighting these oppressors without the knowledge of the history that created them. She speaks to the importance of lifting up your neighbor and how this bill empowers all to do so.

The Education Committee received over 200 similar pieces of testimony in support of this bill. Students, teachers, parents, and advocates support the inclusion of African American studies to the curriculum.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE): CABE supports the initiative of this bill but opposes the specific curriculum mandates. They believe resources are available from the DOE to enable districts to incorporate these topics, making a mandate unnecessary.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin

Date: 4/9/2019