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

My name is Chinedum Nnodum. I am a resident from Bridgeport and I am a program director of Students for Educational Justice. I support Bill 7082 with SEJ’s amendments. This bill is important to me because many of America’s social ills are due to simple ignorance wrought of an ineffective history education.

My school experience was full of learning; science, math, literature were robust subjects. I learned many things, further bolstered by extracurricular programs like Upward Bound and ConnCAP. However, school always felt like something was missing. One of the strongest indicators of this was my sophomore year of high school when I got into an argument with my geography teacher about my family home country of Nigeria. It was then I realized very little was taught about people of African descent outside of slavery and civil rights. My teachers (mostly white) knew little about my people, abroad or in the United States. I was able to take up to AP US History, a course that had almost no mention of Black people contributions to this nation. I had the good fortune to have access to libraries over the years to deepen my knowledge of Black people, yet this is not the case for countless students across our nation.

Most of my career has been dedicated to bolstering up my community through educational programming. Whether it was teaching young men about parenting and child development or getting students to engage in service around their community, all groups were stronger the more they know about their people’s past (both locally and nationally). I have studied and worked alongside white people who have gained a better perspective on life based on learning the histories of Black people in this country. When people gain a strong understanding of the United States full history, it allows everyone to navigate our system better to the benefit of all.

Although bill 7082 is asking for African-American studies, I ask that the committee be willing to make amendments to ensure that we actually achieve our goal of abolishing misconceptions on race and racial oppression in the United States. The plight of Black people in this country is completely intertwined with every part of America’s history and everyone suffers from the lack of knowledge. I support the amendments proposed by Students for Educational Justice based on how a focus on race and racial oppression will allow for all minority groups to be acknowledged, while highlighting the particular struggles unique to the African-American experience. Furthermore, requiring anti-racism training ensures that non-Black teachers will be confident in their teaching and leave their bias at the classroom door. I have undergone such training and it has been an effective support for engaging Black and brown populations by identifying systematic issues that all educators should be aware of. The addition of an oversight committee is also necessary to further support the trainings teachers will be undergoing and identify effective course materials.

I dream of a United States in which all the citizens know the entirety of our nation’s history, that we can be a country that operates acknowledging the contributions of all but thankful to the trials Black people have endured to get us all here. Pass this bill with the suggested amendments and be a leader in correcting our country’s path.

Thank you for your time,

Chinedum Valentine Nnodum