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

My name is Joshua Wyrtzen. I am a parent in Hamden, Connecticut with two children at Spring Glen and Hamden Middle School, and my youngest daughter will start at Spring Glen Elementary next year.

I support House Bill 7082 with SEJ’s amendments as a white father. I truly believe African American history IS American history. To overlook or limit Black history from the study of history in our schools is a failure to acknowledge the totality of our history. To introduce and teach African American history AS American history will enrich and expand our children’s education, celebrate the kaleidoscope of contributions that have nurtured the best in our cultures and communal expressions, increase our children’s ability to empathize with and understand each other as they learn from past and present injustice, and accelerate their desire to forge ahead towards a better, more equitable future - together. I expect that, in school, as in the home, my kids will be taught the history of racism in America and how racism impacts their non-white friends and infiltrates systems in which they live and operate. I hope that this education will give them the eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to work against the ways in which racism continues to unnecessarily oppress people of color in America.

I taught English at a Texas high school for four years. I am acutely aware of the racism and bias that seeps through school curriculum, programs, and testing and the impact it has on students of color, how it creates an unnecessary obstacle that limits their opportunities and even threatens violence on their minds and bodies. I do not want something as stupid as racism to be a barbed wire fence that keeps students of color from accessing the promise and opportunities that hard work and education offer. I do not want something as stupid as racism to be something I have to keep unteaching my own children (as I do now) after they come home from school.

House Bill 7082 is a step towards ending the stupidity and raising the level education in Connecticut, to celebrate and encourage the voices, talents, and contributions of our youth regardless of their race.

In Hamden, 62% of our students are students of color, but 91% of our teachers are white. We continue to struggle with wide gaps in testing scores, graduation readiness, and our discipline disparities by race are shameful. As a former white teacher, I do believe that our teachers have good hearts and their convictions towards teaching are pure. However, I also know that could not, myself, teach what I haven't learned and anti-racist training and accountability are critical to ensuring that the cancer of racism isn’t spread through lack of understanding and empathy.

As a member of the parent-led Hamden Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist committee, I am actively working to help support teachers, administrators, and curriculum creators in Hamden to continuously pursue a better, more vibrant education for our children in our schools. Our first work was to increase equal representation in the literature available at Spring Glen Elementary. We are now
pushing for anti-racism training for our teachers and a more inclusive curriculum. I know this work will take time, but I also believe that, with state leadership supporting the SEJ’s amendments to HB 7082 - including a focus on the history of race and racism in the United States, anti-bias training for social studies teachers and the creation of a state curriculum building committee - we can cultivate an educational culture and system in Connecticut that pioneers a pathway to success for all of our children and lay a foundation today for a better tomorrow.

Blessings,

Joshua Wyrtzen