



## End of Session Report

The mission of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) is to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of the African-American community in the State of Connecticut. The 2015 legislative session ended with many gains for the African American community in the state. While there is still much work to be done we are proud of our accomplishments and look forward to continuing in this trend of progress. The AAAC provided testimony of 28 bills this session many of which successfully passed both chambers. This report gives an overview of the bills that we supported.

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### Economic Development

The poverty gap in Connecticut is one of the largest in the nation, with African-American families being on the poorest end of the spectrum and having less wealth than white families. In order to change these statistics broad policy changes need to be made to current economic development policies. During the legislative session there was a concerted effort to increase minority representation in the small business express program and an expansion of the state small business set-aside program to include municipal construction projects. HB 6827 and HB 6086 Both of these measures were incorporated into the budget implementer.



Mayor Toni Harp and Jackie James

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Bill signing for PA 15-108

## Education

### Education

Addressing the achievement gap in the state has long been a priority of policy makers. During the legislative session some of the education issues that came to the forefront of discussions included: disproportionate numbers for minorities in suspensions and expulsions data along with school based arrests PA 15-96 and PA 15-168; chronic absenteeism PA 15-225; cultural competency PA 15-108; and creating efficacy in teacher preparation programs PA 15-243. These policies take a holistic approach to education by ensuring that students are showing up for school feeling prepared, engaged and ready to learn with the best possible educators who are trained to educate individuals from diverse backgrounds.

### PA 15-168

- Requires local or regional school boards to enter into an MOU with their local police department to clearly define what the roles and responsibilities are for school resource officers
- Requires State Department of Education (SDE) to disaggregate data for school based arrest based by school, race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, English language learner (ELL) status, free and reduced price lunch eligibility, offense type, and the number of arrests at each school.

#### PA 15-96

- Prohibits out of school suspension and expulsions for students in preschool and grades K-2. There are exceptions provided for violent behavior, drug offences and possession of weapons.
- Requires early detection of and intervention for mental health services for students displaying violent behavior.

#### PA 15-225

- Requires local and regional boards of education to create attendance review teams and report to the SDE.
- Requires SDE along with the interagency for ending the achievement gap to create a chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan.

#### PA 15-108

- Creates a taskforce to study minority teacher recruitment and report back to the Education Committee by February 1st 2016.
- Cultural competency training will be added to teacher preparation programs and in-service trainings.

#### PA 15-243

- Requires all teacher preparation programs to give their students teaching diverse teaching experience by practicing in both high and low achieving school districts.

In addition to K-12 education policy the banking committee passed a student loan bill of rights PA 15-162 which will help many minority students, especially those who are First Generation College students, navigate the student loan process and understand their rights and responsibilities as student loan borrowers.

#### PA 15-162

- Requires the Banking department to create a student loan ombudsman position which will be an advocate for consumers.
- Requires the creation of a student loan borrower education course.

## Housing

Racial segregation in the major cities of Connecticut is at an all-time high and the majority of minorities are living in the cities which have very little economic opportunity, neighborhoods are crime ridden, the public schools are poorly resourced and there is lack of access to reliable public transportation. PA 15-153 addresses this problem by helping poor families using housing vouchers relocate to "higher opportunity" areas.



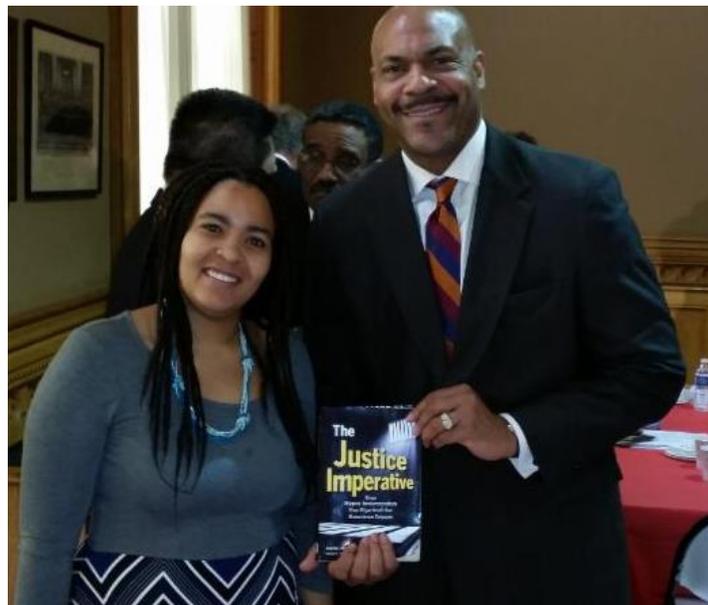
Mobility Counselling Bill Signing

### PA 15-153

- Requires Department of Housing to offer mobility counselling to section 8 and rental assistance program voucher holders, the counselling will include information on schools, communities and employment opportunities.

## Criminal Justice

With the increasing popularity of social media there has been a flurry of attention placed on the racial inequities which are present in the criminal justice system. This session the legislature placed emphasis on the juvenile justice system PA 15-183, addressed lengthy sentences for youth PA 15-84, drug possession PA 15-2 and police accountability PA 15-4. These measures are aimed at addressing disproportionate minority contact with the police and racial equity judicial system as a whole.



Justice Imperative event with Rep. McCrory

### PA 15-183

- Eliminates the automatic transfer of children aged 14-17 to adult court for certain offences.
- Creates the presumption that juveniles will not be shackled in court
- Expands the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee's (JJPOC) membership and responsibilities

#### PA 15-84

- Eliminate life sentences for capital felony, arson and murder charge convictions for minors under the age of 18.
- Establishes alternative parole eligibility for minors who commit serious crimes under the age of 18.

#### SS PA 14-4

- Requires all police officers to wear body cameras
- Requires specific training for (a) using physical force; (b) using body-worn recording equipment and retaining the records it creates; and (c) cultural competency, sensitivity, and bias-free policing.
- Police Departments to create guidelines to recruit and retain police officers who are minorities

#### SS PA 15-2

- Replaces current drug possession laws to make changes that lessen possession charges down to a Class A misdemeanor giving courts more discretion in dealing with repeat drug offenders and referring them to treatment options rather than incarceration.

## Other bills the Commission supported



AAAC Black History Month event

- [SB 944](#) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENT
- [HB 6835](#) AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
- [SB 101](#) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO INCREASE DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE OF STATE CONTRACTORS
- [HB 6768](#) AN ACT CLARIFYING THAT PRIVATE OCCUPATIONAL SCHOOLS FUNCTION AS POSTSECONDARY CAREER SCHOOLS
- [HB 6767](#) AN ACT CONCERNING PRIVATE OCCUPATIONAL SCHOOLS
- [SA 15-18](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF DIGITAL OPEN-SOURCE TEXTBOOKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
- [SB 950](#) AN ACT ENABLING THE REFINANCING OF STUDENT LOANS
- [HB 6461](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- [HB 6640](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALLOCATION OF LOW INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDITS
- [SB 408](#) AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS
- [PA 15-34](#) AN ACT CONCERNING LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN HOSPITALS
- [PA 15-109](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITY IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE REMOVAL OF THE TERMS "CRIPPLED" AND "DEFECTIVE EYESIGHT" FROM THE GENERAL STATUTES
- [SB 1104](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARIZATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES
- [HB 7039](#) AN ACT CONCERNING CIVIL IMMIGRATION DETAINERS
- [PA 15-83](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ENFORCEMENT OF ORDINANCES



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