

Revised Testimony to Sen. Government Operations Committee re PR.2: 4/4/19

Sylvia Knight  
13 Claire Pointe Rd  
Burlington VT 05408  
[sknightinv73@gmail.com](mailto:sknightinv73@gmail.com)



PR.2 provides a unique moment in history when we can begin to rectify the troubling and damaging legacy of slavery in our country. It is time to make certain that Vermont's Constitution, the basis of our laws, does not in any way provide a basis for inequity or inequality between persons or groups of people.

Since the 1960s I have become painfully aware of the effects of inequity and racism on myself, my family and on my brothers and sisters of color. As whites, we participate in implicit bias and benefit from institutionalized racial inequity. It is ingrained in our laws, institutions and cultures. Slavery and racism based in the social construct of white supremacy has been perpetuated in Jim Crow, lynching, mass incarcerations and *de jure* segregation (1). In Vermont we have seen neighborhoods with restrictive covenants, failure to protect Black people in Vermont from racial harassment, and criminalization of black and brown people with unequal treatment before the law.

As our nation was built on systemic racism and inequality based on law, we must remove the legal basis for inequality and systemic racism in order to create racial justice in Vermont. Healing cannot happen without movement toward justice.

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 signed by the United States we read:

“... recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...” (2)

The amended version of PR.2 beginning with “therefore no person born in this country” maintains references to conditions of inequality that are not clear or helpful in moving toward racial equity and justice.

I urge that you adopt the language suggested by Peter Teachout: adding after “therefore”, “slavery and indentured servitude in any form are prohibited” and omitting the remaining language.

Please help us amend our Constitution so that it upholds the principle of inherent dignity and equal, inalienable rights for all.

---

(1) See Rothstein, Richard, The Color of Law (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017)

(2) <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>