

MaryAnn Songhurst

Testimony in Support of H.3

Montpelier High School student

February 8th, 2019

Good Morning and thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is MaryAnn Songhurst and I am testifying in support of House bill number three, An act relating to ethnic and social equity studies standards for public schools, because it is important to recognize that the state of racism continues to persist and create repetitive problems with negative impacts on students in Vermont educational institutions.

I am sixteen years old and a transracially adopted Haitian American female who attends Montpelier High School as a Junior. I have been in the Vermont public education system since I was in kindergarten and have directly experienced the immediate and long term effects of racism because I bear a darker skin tone that stands out amongst my classmates. The curriculums I and many others in Vermont schools have been exposed to have promoted racial stereotypes that influence the creation of individual biases that foster a climate filled with negative classroom engagement, allows for racial harassment to persist and grow instead of eliminating it, and has not allowed for the safe and encouraging space for intersectional education to be actually taught to the students.

As a result of my personal experiences with combatting and dealing with blunt racism, particularly in school, I decided to do something about it through a proactive approach to change the system and expand student-teacher knowledge of the beauty of having a comprehensive racial discourse to move forward with in the world. Although it is not my job as a student to educate and enlighten others, I began to use my voice as an instrument of positive power to start important conversations in the classroom around social and racial equity that went beneath surface level, and became a Vermont activist for justice in all forms through dismantling unjust systems embedded into educational institutions.

This bill focuses on establishing a large group of people who are not changing the curriculums but creating new overarching standards based on reports to guide Vermont Schools in establishing and implementing new or revised curriculums. As written, the bill does not

require any student voice or person who has actually experienced harassment as a member of a marginalized ethnic or social group to be directly engaged as part of the Advisory Working Group. In my opinion, this is a serious problem that actually can be dangerous in the long run because the lack of direct voice not only silences the victims but will also degrade the standards that are being put forward. This will do more harm than good. I strongly encourage that Education Committee ensure that among the members, despite their degree or credentials, is someone who is able to speak directly from their own personal experience.

Thank you and I look forward to seeing H.3 passed.