



May 4, 2023

To the House Education Committee and Senate Education Committee:

I have a dream that every child in Vermont will be safe in schools and receive their true rights to an education under the constitution of this nation and the state of Vermont. As the president of the Rutland Area NAACP, I urge you to support S.103: An act relating to amending the prohibitions against discrimination and the amendment for H.461.

The Rutland Area NAACP has been tirelessly advocating for impacted families to be part of this legislative process. However, we have encountered two significant barriers. Firstly, it is a burden for people who do not get paid for a living to testify and then be dismissed because there is no time. Secondly, families are afraid of retaliation in their communities and lack confidence in this body to take them seriously and protect them.

We receive more complaints about racial violence in schools than any other issue. The complaints are always similar - racial aggression or slurs, followed by a report made by a child or parent to the school. They often have to prove the incident occurred and are met with confusion and gaslighting. In most cases, the issue is dismissed and the child is told that it is not a big deal. This pattern repeats throughout the year, leading to devastating consequences for children.

Children stop attending school, start losing weight, hair, and exhibit out-of-character behavior, leading to disciplinary action and damaging records. In some cases, children begin to have suicidal ideation. Every BIPOC family in Vermont that I know has a story about racial violence in schools. Even my own family has been a victim of this violence.

When we moved to Vermont approximately 8 years ago, within a week of attending public school in Vermont, my son was called an ethnic slur and met with physical violence. No call was made to me, and my son came home in tears. When I followed up, I was told nothing could be done and that the kids in this state do not often see people like us. I remember the exact words "I'm sure you understand," This was a cue to me that the normalization of toxic racial school culture was a burden that all Black and Brown kids must just accept. That is exactly what happened, My son continued to endure this through his public school experience in Vermont. Seven years later as he was about to graduate, my son was called the same racial slur and this time he could not take it anymore. My son, a model student, captain of the football team, and college-bound, reacted physically. The school attempted to handle it, but ultimately my son was forced to apologize to the child who called him the racial slur because of a threat to press charges for assault.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, who is committed to addressing the factors that affect child and adolescent health, submitted a policy statement on "[The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.](#)" The statement highlights that racism causes chronic stress, trauma, and leads to adverse health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and even cardiovascular disease.

It is curious to have witnessed organizations come forth and so aggressively be against relieving the burden of harassment on students. They have statements listed under their values that compel us to believe that they want to ensure that every student is supported in their school journey. They have even purported to uplift statements of equity and yet their arguments against this bill center around supposed burdens on schools and a lack of training and possible liability, with no consideration for the actual lives and experiences of children that are most impacted.

As James Baldwin, a great civil rights leader, academic and prolific author, once said, "I cannot believe what you say because I see what you do." This statement speaks to the disconnect between these organizations' words and actions. It highlights the hypocrisy and lack of integrity in their position. It suggests that while they may claim to value diversity and equity, their actions indicate otherwise. It suggests that they are not taking meaningful steps to address issues of discrimination and racism in their institutions, and are not truly committed to creating an inclusive and equitable environment for all students. We challenge them to be accountable for their actions and to align their words with their deeds. Actions speak louder than words, and true change requires a genuine commitment to equity and justice. This legislation is an opportunity to meet that challenge.

As human beings in positions of power elected by people from all walks of life, I urge you to ask yourselves who you are centering in your decisions. If the answer is not to help students thrive and receive a safe education, but to protect false interests of burden on schools or even money, then I ask you, to re-evaluate that notion and focus on the future of our children, their health, their well being and their right to an education.

This legislation is a proactive way to acknowledge and reduce implicit and explicit bias in education institutions, facilitating accountability and conversations that help remove the current toxic education norms to place burdens on the vulnerable children and force the institutions to uphold their stated commitments to provide all children with the educations that they deserve. Let us come together and stand for what is right. Let us protect our children from the devastating effects of racism. Let us pass S.103.

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