

Leila Tati Pambou
Yarmouth High School Black Student Union

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Leila Tati Pambou and I live in Yarmouth. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Black Student Union at Yarmouth High School, and in support of LD 187 - An Act To Require Education about African-American History and the History of Genocide.

The Black Student Union (BSU) is a club at Yarmouth High School (YHS) composed of Black Indigenous Students of Color and their allies. The mission of BSU is to bring awareness to topics that African Americans and Black People face by having safe discussions on ways to eliminate racism, prejudice, inequality, discrimination and more.

The BSU is working to facilitate anti-racism in our school by building a greater awareness and understanding of the experience of people of color. Much of the current U.S. History curriculum does not explore African American heritage and neglects the many contributions of BIPOC. In addition, the extreme violence experienced by African Americans and Black People is often minimized. The social studies curriculum typically centers around the white experience and perspective which in turn contributes to the perception that success and significance are tied to Whiteness.

We believe it is important for all students and teachers to expand their knowledge of African American history and learn about the historical origins of racism. We feel this is essential if systemic racism is to be addressed effectively. In addition, students will gain context for current racial incidents such as the murder of George Floyd by learning about the origins of police brutality in the Black community, including slave patrols and the many examples of excessive force during civil rights protests.

It is important for students and teachers to explore how our country's history has impacted and contributed to systemic racism as well as learn about historical figures of color that were erased from much of the current curriculum. A better understanding of our past will provide for a path of inclusion and anti-racism in our schools.

Since many of our schools are predominantly composed of white students, it is important that we require African American history and genocide to be taught in our schools. BIPOC students do not have the privilege of ignoring their history as it impacts their daily life. This bill will allow for all students to learn about the contributions and struggles of people of color. It will provide white students as well as students of color with exposure to curriculum that will help dismantle systemic racism.

Finally, including African American history into the school curriculum will also allow students of color to feel valued and appreciated by their community and administration. By being the focus, rather than an addendum, students of color can begin to feel as though their unique history has been elevated in its importance within our state and will see their experience reflected in their education.

Thank you for considering our testimony and for proposing a bill to help create a more inclusive educational experience for students in Maine.

Sincerely,
Students of the Black Student Union of Yarmouth High School