



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In support of H.584/S.365 An Act relative to anti-racism, equity and justice in education
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues across the state, supports H.584/S.365 An Act relative to anti-racism, equity and justice in education. By establishing the Commission for Anti-Racism and Equity in Education, with a broad range of community stake holders, this bill creates a thoughtful approach to education about racial and justice issues at a time when the political environment in our nation makes it difficult to discuss this important issue that is essential to democracy. The League of Women Voters has as its core mission the support of democracy and citizen engagement to make democracy work. As an organization, we believe that our country's core democracy values of equality and justice cannot be realized in a society where racial inequity and injustice continue to exist. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has made the following affirmation about countering racism:

Here in Massachusetts, we commit as individuals and as a League to hold ourselves accountable: to listen to Black voices in our communities and the Commonwealth, to educate ourselves better and stand against the racism prevalent in our society, and to advocate for policies and practices to eliminate systemic racism in Massachusetts.

It is the duty of public education to prepare students for life in a democratic society and therefore, understanding the historic and systemic roots of racism and ways to eliminate it are legitimate and essential topics for curriculum. As a retired Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, I find the resources this bill will create to be essential for successful instruction about racism and I would like to explain why.

First, one way to create a non-controversial space for this curriculum to develop is with the start of a commission comprised of a broad range of stakeholders in education and in equity issues. A commission can solicit experts in the field to identify the relevant knowledge base and resources. A commission can develop a report that offers a balanced perspective on the instructional approach. By establishing guiding principles for anti-racism education and identifying resources, a commission would be creating a foundation for anti-racism education that would help it to be done well.

In the past year, certain political forces have sought to criticize school committees for teaching about diversity, equity and inclusion. Because this topic has become politicized, it is unfair to ask school communities and individual teachers to have to defend themselves against political attack for teaching what should be recognized as essential knowledge for understanding our country and how to make it a more perfect union. I have had the personal experience of speaking at the public participation portion of my local school committee to defend the school committee's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion after several people from the community questioned that direction. A commission and the report and resources it could provide would go a



long way to creating a successful state wide foundation for anti-racism curriculum and instruction.

Secondly, the bill establishes an Anti-Racism and Equity in Education Trust Fund that will support curriculum resources and professional development for effective instruction. Moreover, a grant program that will be supported by the Trust Fund will give schools the material support they need to implement this curriculum skillfully. Nothing undermines a new curriculum more than lack of appropriate materials and lack of skillful teaching. This provision of material support and professional development is essential for the successful implementation of this curriculum.

In summary, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports this bill and we ask that you report it out favorably.