

Fast facts: An Act Relative to Antiracism, Equity and Justice in Education

S365 Presenter: Senator Jason Lewis

H584 Presenters: Representative Nika Elugardo and Representative Erika Uytterhoeven

“As a rising senior at Malden High School, I know that our curriculum is in no way reflective of our diverse student body. We have always praised ourselves as the “most diverse high school” in Massachusetts, but our classes merely repeat the same history that has been taught to us since middle school. From the Triangular Trade to World War II, Malden High’s history classes solely focus on white experiences and nothing more. Our students offer such a wealth of backgrounds and experiences that unfortunately do not get translated into our classrooms. With our predominantly white staff, this makes it hard for Malden High students to learn about their own narrative and history. Malden High needs to do better.” - Billy Zeng, 17

* Massachusetts S365 and H584 were proposed in response to the accounts of students, teachers and other community organizations that people of color are underrepresented and underserved in curriculum, pedagogy and educational practice. These inequities have had deleterious effects on the physical and mental health of BIPOC communities as well as serving to exclude these groups from being seen and participating fully in society, which ironically would not exist in its current form without their presence. The events of 2020 and early 2021, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant rise in anti-Asian racism, police brutality against Black and Brown Americans including the murder of George Floyd, and the attack on the DC Capitol building, only did more to lay bare the fundamental social, economic and health disparities caused by racial inequity.

* The intention of this bill is to create a Commission for Anti-Racism and Equity in Education, with members chosen from advocacy groups, teacher and superintendent unions and associations, and parent groups, with an eye toward ensuring all major ethnic groups in the Massachusetts area are represented. The purpose of the Commission will be to

- Develop curriculum materials with a social justice perspective of dismantling racism and to advise the department on improving the history and social sciences framework

- Ensure that ethnic studies, racial justice, decolonizing history, and unlearning racism is taught at all grade levels using a critical approach and pedagogy that is age-appropriate

- Advise the Department on ways to ensure equity on the Massachusetts Test for Education Licensure

- Ensure that teachers and school counselors have access to professional development that fosters equitable, inclusive curriculum, and pedagogy and practices that support racial justice.

*The Commission will also advise the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on how to best promote efforts to increase, support and retain teachers and school counselors of color in our public school workforce.

*The Commission, in conjunction with the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Board of Education, will develop and administer an Anti-Racism and Equity in Education grant program to allocate funds for public schools and school districts to promote racial equity and racial and ethnic studies within and across school districts on an application basis. Funds and resources for universities and other community groups working in education will also be considered and administered by the Commission and the Commissioner.

* The Commission, the Commissioner, and awardees of these funds will work together to analyze the effectiveness of their initiatives, analyze social studies and history curricula and framework through a lens of racial justice, and make amendments to the social studies and history curricula and framework where necessary.

S365 and H584 have been assigned to the Joint Committee on Education and is awaiting a hearing schedule.