# *Testimony of*

**Faith Sweeney**

**Westport Educator**

*Before the*

**Committee on Children**

*Re:*

**SB 327 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE EFFECTS OF HATE SPEECH ON CHILDREN’S HELATH AND ACHIEVEMENT**

March 5, 2024

Good Afternoon Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Representative Dauphinais, Senator Seminara, and esteemed members of the Committee on Children,.

My name is Faith Sweeney, and I am a biracial black woman.  I am in my 28th year of teaching. Based on my experience as an elementary and middle school educator in both affluent and Title I schools, I can attest to the devastating impact hate speech has upon our children.

I have witnessed children in all grades hearing and using hate speech such as the N-word, spear chucker, and other words similar to the n-word throughout my own childhood and career.  As a professional development facilitator, I have surveyed numerous educators about microaggressions and hate speech.  Participant responses ranged from witnessing racist, antisemitic, Islamophobic, homophobic comments, and much more.

The impact of hate speech is negative.  Students become anxious and withdrawn.  Students subjected to hate speech are consumed with negative feelings about themselves which reduces their self-esteem.  When students are constantly asking themselves, “Why am I not good enough?” They lose the confidence to participate, build trusting friendships, and develop a sense of belonging.

In addition to hate speech being detrimental to the mental health and achievement of students; daily microaggressions, acts of exclusion, and discriminatory practices chip away at the wellbeing of any human being subjected to these forms of hate.

I encourage the task force to study the research of Bettina Love, Claude Steele, Zarretta Hammond, Geoffery Cohen, and other leaders in social justice who have written about belonging, culturally responsive teaching, and bias.  By doing so, the task force can also support, fund, and mandate solutions to create more welcoming school communities.

It is essential that this task force not only study the impact of hate speech, discrimination, microaggression, and bias, it is equally important to develop solutions to care for the mental health of students subjected to hate speech.

In closing, I encourage you to include school psychologists at all levels from urban, suburban, rural communities on the task force.