

2021 -- H 5697

=====  
LC001597  
=====

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

—————  
A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- AFRICAN HERITAGE HISTORY EDUCATION

Introduced By: Representatives Williams, Hull, Alzate, Barros, Henries, Biah, Abney,  
Morales, Giraldo, and Cassar

Date Introduced: February 24, 2021

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 110

4 AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

5 SCHOOL

6 **16-110-1. Legislative findings.**

7 The General Assembly hereby finds and declares that:

8 (1) Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its Royal Charter  
9 on July 8, 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter guaranteeing that  
10 individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice without any  
11 interference from the government.

12 (2) As Rhode Island became the first American colony to declare its independence from  
13 Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it simultaneously was one of the most active slave ports in British  
14 North America within the Transatlantic Slave Trade transporting thousands of enslaved Africans  
15 to the colony, with the first documented slave ship arriving at Newport in 1696.

16 (3) The contributions of African Heritage Peoples from across the African Diaspora  
17 representing all walks of life and their endeavors to learn and thrive throughout history and make  
18 unforgettable marks in our state and nation as artists, scientists, educators, businesspeople,  
19 influential thinkers, members of the faith community, athletes, and political and governmental

1 leaders, reflects the greatness of the state of Rhode Island.

2 (4) The United States Department of Education says "education is primarily a state and  
3 local responsibility in the United States. It is states and communities, as well as public and private  
4 organizations of all kinds that establish schools and college and develop curricula."

5 (5) The state of Rhode Island also has previously demonstrated its concerns and interests  
6 regarding raising awareness on the subject of African Heritage and History through the work of the  
7 1696 Historical Commission as established by the general assembly and signed into law on July 1,  
8 2014 and was tasked with developing a comprehensive African Heritage History curriculum for  
9 Rhode Island public schools from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) and said commission  
10 led by our secretary of state and comprised of scholars, civic and educational leaders developed  
11 and submitted a comprehensive report that included units of instruction and educational resources.

12 (6) With the unifying call for Black Lives Matter, racial reconciliation, and social justice  
13 during the summer of 2020, and citizen equity being reflected across the state, nation and world,  
14 the establishment of an African Heritage History curriculum in Rhode Island is long overdue. Given  
15 the importance of the issue to the political affairs of the United States, as well as the responsibility  
16 of the state to educate its citizens, it is a fundamental responsibility of the state of Rhode Island to  
17 ensure that the critical subject of African Heritage History is included as part of the curriculum in  
18 all public schools.

19 (7) It is the judgment of the Rhode Island general assembly to encourage that every board  
20 of education in the state shall include instruction on the subject of African Heritage History studies  
21 where in an appropriate place in the curriculum, for all elementary and secondary students.

22 **16-110-2. Definitions.**

23 For the purpose of this chapter, the following words shall have the following meanings:

24 (1) "African Diaspora" means the term commonly used to describe the mass dispersion of  
25 peoples from Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trades, from the 1500s to the 1800s.

26 (2) "African Heritage" means any one people with racial, ethnic and cultural ties to the  
27 African Diaspora.

28 (3) "African Heritage People" means the people that can be seen in our many state residents  
29 of African, white, bi-racial, Latino, Cape Verdean, Caribbean, and Native backgrounds.

30 (4) "Transatlantic Slave Trade" means the forced transportation by European slave traders  
31 of various enslaved African people, mainly to the Americas. Current estimates are that about twelve  
32 million (12,000,000) to twelve million eight hundred thousand (12,800,000) Africans were shipped  
33 across the Atlantic over a span of four hundred (400) years.

34 **16-110-3. Powers and duties.**

1           The state shall adhere to the following procedures:

2           (1) The department of education shall collect and disseminate to every school district,  
3 private school, mayoral academy and charter school, and make available currently on its website at  
4 <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies/ResourcesOnAfricanAmerica>  
5 nHistory.aspx

6           (2) The curriculum materials and such other materials as may assist local and regional  
7 school committees, and governing bodies of any private school, mayoral academy or charter school,  
8 in developing instructional programs pursuant to this section materials on African Heritage and  
9 History.

10          (3) Every school district shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on African  
11 Heritage and History utilizing, but not being limited to, the materials collected and disseminated  
12 by the department of education, commencing with the 2022-2023 school year. Nothing herein shall  
13 require school districts to require African Heritage History instruction in every year, but that  
14 African Heritage education and instruction shall be utilized during appropriate times in the  
15 elementary and secondary school curricula, as determined by the local authority. All students  
16 should have received instruction on African Heritage and History materials by the time they have  
17 graduated from high school.

18           SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

=====  
LC001597  
=====

EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- AFRICAN HERITAGE HISTORY EDUCATION

\*\*\*

- 1           This act would require implementation of education courses in African American history
- 2   in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island commencing in the 2022-2023 school year.
- 3           This act will take effect upon passage.

=====  
LC001597  
=====