

February 22, 2019

Honorable Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, and Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage as state agencies have the important role to advise and inform elected officials about our constituent communities and their needs. Students from our communities currently represent 34% of all students in Minnesota.

While the percentage of students of color and American Indian students in the state has increased from 24% to 34% over the past decade, the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers has remained stagnant at 4%. Thus, **the top priority in education that has united our four Councils over the previous biennium has been the need to increase teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT).**

In 2016 adopted state law, several statutes were amended ensuring all students have “improved and equitable access to effective and diverse teachers” who reflect the diversity of students in their schools. Providing all students with equitable access to teachers of color and indigenous teachers is something our state has yet to do in order to narrow our state’s persistent opportunity and achievement gaps which are among the worst in the country for our constituent communities. **We must do different things as a state if we expect different results in narrowing equity gaps**, and one of the key things that our state has not addressed systemically is the persistent shortage of TOCAIT.

Therefore, **we strongly recommend that you fully support all of the policy language in the 2019 Increase Teachers of Color Act (H.F. 824)** that will strengthen program investments and address systemic barriers to TOCAIT recruitment, preparation and retention while also addressing factors that contribute to the “underachievement” of students from our communities. The comprehensive set of policy proposals in H.F. 824 has been informed by feedback from hundreds of members and educators from of our communities over the past 2 years and has been vetted and endorsed by more than two dozen important organizations. Among the important amendments in this bill is language that would require districts have plans to ensure that curriculum as well as learning and work environments are inclusive and respectful of all racial and ethnic groups. Inclusive and respectful school climate and curriculum is imperative to TOCAIT retention efforts as well as the improved engagement of all students and their parents.

Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right and needed by fully supporting **H.F. 824**.

Sincerely,

Henry Jiménez | Executive Director | Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

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Justin Terrell | Executive Director | Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage