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January 25, 2021

RE: Increase Teachers of Color Act

Dear Members of House and Senate Education and Higher Education Committees,

Youthprise is pleased to endorse the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (ITCA), which advocates for systems change that strengthen existing programs and propose new efforts to attract, prepare and retain an increased percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) in Minnesota.

We urge the Committees to pass the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act as part of this legislative session. At the moment, about 34 percent of K-12 students in the state are nonwhite, while teachers of color make up only 5 percent of part-time and full-time teachers. Passing this legislation will be highly beneficial to Minnesota's youth and families because it will promote teaching diversity. Increasing the percentage of TOCAIT in the classroom exposes students to various cultural and social groups, preparing students to become better citizens and feel a sense of belonging in their community.

Youthprise was founded as a nonprofit philanthropic intermediary in 2010 by the McKnight Foundation. Since launching, Youthprise has leveraged its financial, political, and relational capital to increase funding for Minnesota youth programming and promote innovation in how our communities work with youth. We do this work by mobilizing and investing resources, advancing knowledge, and advocating for change to innovate systems, structures, and practices that enable youth to thrive. Our mission at Youthprise is to increase equity with and for Minnesota's indigenous, low-income, and racially diverse youth.

In 2020, Youthprise launched a multi-year, youth-centered and youth-informed policy agenda called *A New Generation of Equity*. This policy agenda was developed with youth front and center. Young people of various ethnicities ages 16 to 25 from across Minnesota participated in several focus groups, which culminated in an idea building session to inform the agenda. Youth expressed the need for more TOCAIT who look like them because they want to feel comfortable. Other youth identified that having teacher diversity will improve their overall learning experience. Students tend to be inspired by role models they can relate to. Simply recruiting and hiring more TOCAIT is not enough; we need significant systemic and cultural changes to retain teachers of color and encourage students of color to become teachers as well.

In our policy agenda, Youthprise has included increasing TOCAIT as one of the policy priorities we support. We believe recommendations mentioned in the ITCA bill like providing scholarships for student teachers so they do not have to work for free and creating teaching courses like American Indian Teacher Preparation Programs are vital.

Thank you for considering this important issue. Youthprise and the youth of Minnesota are hoping that adding our voices will highlight the significance of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wokie Weah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wokie" and the last name "Weah" clearly distinguishable.

Wokie Weah
President