March 8, 2022

Dear Chair Bernardy and Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

As our Councils have done every year since 2017, we are here to share a united message from the three State Ethnic Councils and the Indian Affairs Council in strong support of the Increase Teachers of Color Act Supplemental Funding – H.F.3917 – as our top joint priority in higher education.

While we are grateful for the notable increase in state investments in various grant programs last legislative session compared to the minimal appropriations of the past, which have contributed to the severe shortage of BIPOC teachers, legislative investments in higher education made last session were just 15% of what was estimated as needed to move the needle and increase the percentage of BIPOC teachers. Increased funding as proposed in this bill for the Aspiring MN Educators of Color Scholarships and Underrepresented Student Teacher Grants is crucial because these scholarships and grants will support hundreds of BIPOC teacher candidates already in preparation pathways to finish their licensure programs and become teachers.

As a state, we have yet to take the necessary systemic action to truly achieve improved results and narrow equity gaps, including addressing the persistent shortage of BIPOC teachers. If Minnesota students today had equitable access to teachers who reflect students’ diversity as several statutes assert that they should, there would be 22,000 BIPOC teachers instead of the fewer than 3,000 we have today.

Supporting many more people from our four constituent communities to become teachers will help Minnesota close opportunity and achievement gaps, and help our state reach our higher education attainment goals. These investments will contribute to building and diversifying Minnesota’s workforce in education and other sectors of the economy.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you fully support the proposed strategic investments needed to ensure positive returns on the investments in H.F. 3917. Through a comprehensive package with HF3079, the E12 portion of the Increase Teachers of Color Act, your committee has the opportunity to address systemic barriers to BIPOC recruitment, preparation, and retention.

We urge you to take this step to fully address what is needed to “move the needle” and increase the percentage of BIPOC teachers so our students and families have improved and more equitable access to teachers who reflect their diversity. Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right for the success of all students by fully supporting H.F. 3917.

Sincerely,

Shannon Geshick | Executive Director | Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

Rosa Tock | Executive Director | Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

Sia Her | Executive Director | Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans

Linda Sloan | Executive Director | Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage