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From: AG Ellison

To: E12 and Higher Education Conference Committee Chairs and Members
(E12: Sen. Carla Nelson, Rep. Jim Davnie; Higher Ed: Sen. Paul Anderson, Rep. Connie Bernardy)

CC: Speaker Hortman, Majority Leader Gazelka, Gov. Walz

I am writing to endorse the policy provisions being proposed for the 2020 Increase Teachers of Color Act (Revisor, 20-5604). Minnesota is one of the worst states in the country for education achievement gaps. Currently, who is a part of this society is determined by who you know and much prosperity you have access to. If you are relegated to no opportunity, you are going to be relegated to no achievement. This thwarts your life changes and undermines our collective social opportunity. There is no one simple fix to this problem that we all care about. But, that does not mean we should not try.

Given that our state has only 4% teachers who are of color or American Indian but 34% students who are of color or American Indian, we must do more as a state to ensure that all students have "equitable access to effective and diverse teachers" who reflect the diversity of students as promised in several statutes (i.e., 120B.11, subd 2, 3 and 5; 122A.40, subdivision 8; 122A.41, subd 5; 122A.63, subd 1; 124D.861, subd 1, 3, and 5; 127A.05, subd 6;). In Minneapolis and St. Paul, the percentage of teachers of color and indigenous teachers is approximately 17% while the students in these districts is approximately 70% students of color. This issue is not limited to the metro. The racial gap between students and teachers is even wider in some suburban and Greater Minnesota communities. Research is clear that teachers of color positively impact students of all backgrounds and that education outcomes for students of color and American Indian students is often improved when they are taught by teachers who reflect their backgrounds.

I'm aware that the proposed policies changes represent community-identified solutions to address the severe shortage of racially and ethnically diverse teachers that contributes to other problems in our schools and community. Passing the Increase Teachers of Color Act is the top joint priority in education of Minnesota's three Ethnic Councils and Indian Affairs Council who worked in partnership with the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota to craft the bill language. As an elected official, I appreciate the process and input from the community and the four councils regarding how best to address the disparities impacting the communities they represent.

The 2020 Increase Teachers of Act is based on the policy proposals in the 2019 bill (HF 824/SF1012) which had strong bipartisan co-authorship in both the House and Senate. Your investments will likely have a significant return for the public good, and will be an important proactive step towards addressing opportunity and achievement gaps statewide.

Sincerely,



KEITH ELLISON
State of Minnesota Attorney General