



May 6, 2020

Dear Chair Youakim and Honorable Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs has an important role as a state agency to advise and inform elected officials about our constituent communities and their needs. Utilizing a holistic lens, our agency has placed significant focus on intentional policies that address the state's chronic and persistent achievement and opportunity gaps. It is then with pleasure that I write today in support of the policy provisions in DE3 of HF163 (Art. 1, Sec. 1, 2, 6; Art. 3, Sec. 1) that serve as foundational policy to address said gaps and improve the recruitment and retention of teachers who more closely reflect the diversity of students throughout Minnesota.

Over the course of the past two months, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MCLA has been in extensive conversations with stakeholders as we assess the impact on the Latino community. Within those conversations, there is no question that educators across the state are working around the clock to serve their students. However, it is very apparent that the state's mentioned systemic gaps have only been exacerbated during this unprecedented time. The policy proposals above then serve to guide districts and charter schools in better serving our students and families across the state beyond the time of pandemic response.

Therefore, we strongly urge you to support the policy language in DE3 of HF163 that has been informed by feedback from hundreds of members and educators from communities of color and American Indian communities over the past three years and has been vetted and endorsed by more than two dozen important organizations.

One critical component of the policy proposal is the requiring of districts to have plans to ensure that curriculum as well as learning and work environments are inclusive and respectful of all racial and ethnic groups. An inclusive and respectful school climate and curriculum is imperative to improved engagement of all students and their parents.

An additional significant provision of this proposal would establish a state goal to increase the percentage of TOCAIT each year and have a teaching workforce that reflects the diversity of K12 students by 2040. The need for a teacher workforce that is reflective of our students has been significantly highlighted in the challenges students and families have shared as they currently navigate through distance learning. This language then would ensure that there is urgency at all levels to intentionally and legitimately address the state's chronic shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers.

While challenges have clearly manifested in providing equitable education, there remains opportunity to intentionally improve efforts in serving all Minnesota children and families. Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right for the success of all students by supporting policy that intentionally focuses on addressing the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps in our state.

Sincerely,

Samantha N. Diaz | Legislative and Policy Director | Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs