

Mn House Education Committee - Hearing on HF217

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Thank you legislators and staff for the work you do to represent your constituents. I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

For over thirty years I have been aware of the lack of people of color and indigenous people in our teaching staff in Minnesota. The leadership groups that I was a part of tried to address the need this creates in our classrooms. We have listened to communities of color, and this legislation addresses many of the barriers identified by them.

There is both science and art to teaching. Part of the art of teaching is being able to see things through the lens of each of your students. Teaching is about relationship. Positive relationship is most easily built when we are open to learning from each other, and willing to listen and positively respond to differences.

The turbulence of the last year has even more pointedly revealed the current state of inequity and unrest in our communities. It is my belief that education is a key component to overcoming some aspects of these concerns. Due to the current teacher shortage, which is likely to be even more severe in the coming years, we have an opportunity for even more newly licensed teachers. This bill addresses some of the concerns I have heard from people of color in my four decades as a teacher. Often there is need for additional financial and institutional support on the road to teacher licensure for people of color, indigenous people and for those living in poverty. This bill has language addressing the need for:

- Grow Your Own programs, such as Pathways2Teaching in Duluth, and para-cohort programs,
- financial and institutional assistance for teacher candidates,
- testing accommodations in the form of untimed tests,
- a cap on testing fees,
- improvements in mentorship, curriculum and school climate,,
- and other barriers to people of color getting through the rigor of teacher prep.

Our schools need your help to build bridges and pathways to assure that we have highly qualified teachers who reflect the cultural composition of our communities.

Unfortunately, another comment I have heard in response to my question, “Why are so few students of color choosing education as a career?” They have said, “Because we don’t think you want us.” This cannot be overcome by legislation...it will take the listening and learning efforts to bring about the reflective change needed in our communities.

If the needs of each child is at the core of planning the future of education and our work force, we owe it to each child to assure that their education prepares them to understand their world. HF217 will help to create the future that we want for each child in Minnesota.