

Esteemed Representative Youakim and members of the committees,

I am writing to impress upon you the importance of passing House File 4500. Teaching is a vocation. Unfortunately, not all those who hear the call to teach are able to heed it. It is imperative that we reduce barriers and increase incentives so that more people of color are able to follow their calling to become teachers.

The Teachers of Color Act is a crucial step towards that aim. I know this because it allowed me to follow my calling. I am currently a fourth grade teacher at Emerson Spanish Immersion Learning Center with Minneapolis Public Schools. I have been working as a classroom teacher for the last three years. Before that, I spent the previous decade working as a lawyer and public defender in Hennepin County. It was immediately following the peak of COVID that I felt called to become a teacher. I had taken 9 months off of work to help my kindergarten-aged son with distance learning, and after returning to the public defender's office, I no longer felt like I was maximizing my impact. I realized in my heart that what was most in line with my identity and my purpose was to become a teacher in Spanish Immersion. I felt that in this way I could fully embrace my Puerto Rican identity and create justice by teaching the next generation. I wanted to not only teach young people academic skills, but to show them their own worth and the inherent dignity of their peers. I believe this is the paramount role of teachers of color; to foster not only academic success but justice.

Teachers are students' brokers to the world, to society, and to systems of power. What students see in their teachers is what they will internalize about their world. We know this. We know that putting teachers of color in classrooms not only increases academic success, but helps close the opportunity gap, reduces negative student behaviors, increases family engagement, and promotes tolerance and cultural competency. (Gershenson et al., 2021). But beyond just student outcomes, it is a matter of justice for educators as well.

As a Puerto Rican man, I can tell you that there is a stigma against pursuing education as a career. This stigma is then compounded by low salary and high cost of entry into the profession. For many, like myself, these barriers can drown out the call to become a teacher. Were it not for these obstacles, I likely would have pursued education as my first profession, and even when I felt the full strength of this calling, these obstacles still seemed insurmountable. I had two young sons and over a quarter million dollars in student loan debt from law school. Taking on more debt and going to school full time was not an option. My vocation only became a reality thanks to the Minnesota Aspiring Teachers of Color scholarship program, Minnesota's tiered licensure options, and the existence of licensure programs like the Dual Language and Immersion K-6 program at the Univ. of MN where I am currently enrolled.

It is for these reasons that I want to thank you for the opportunities I have received, and implore you to continue and extend the Minnesota Aspiring Teachers of Color scholarship program, the Minnesota Underrepresented Student Teacher grant program, and the Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color grant program.

Graciously,
Morgan France-Ramírez

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Reference:

Gershenson, S., Hansen, M. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *Teacher diversity and student success: Why racial representation matters in the classroom*. Harvard Education Press.