

March 16, 2021

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

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, and Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage have the important role as state agencies to advise and inform elected officials about our constituent communities and their needs. Students from our communities currently represent 35% of all students in schools across Minnesota. Moreover, our communities continue to endure well-documented and widely reported disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in various economic, health, and education measures. Thankfully, comprehensive legislation in H.F. 1041 has been developed over years to address racial disparities in education that have significant and compounding negative impacts on other sectors of society and the economy.

While our state's overall population continues to grow increasingly diverse, the severe shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) remains a persistent problem. At the same time, long-standing research shows that the presence of TOCAIT benefits all students, and the absence of such diversity is detrimental to overall student achievement. It is then, with great urgency, that we write today to ask that you support the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (H.F. 1041), which has been the top education priority that has united our four Councils since the Increase Teachers of Color Act (ITCA) was first introduced in 2017.

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 TOCAIT. Up to this time, we have only invested relatively small amounts in comparatively few and small programs. While this approach has led to modest increases in the numbers of TOCAIT candidates, we have not yet addressed the problem systemically. As a result, the state has remained essentially flat in the percentage of TOCAIT in our schools.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you fully support the proposed strategic investments and important policies needed to ensure positive returns on the investments in H.F. 1041. Through a comprehensive package with the E12 portion of the Act, the committee has the opportunity to address systemic barriers to TOCAIT 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 TOCAIT each year 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. 1041.

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