

Written Testimony

HF2497, Sec. 8. section 124D.65, subdivision 5

EL Funding

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My name is Pa Houa Xiong and I am a special education teacher. I have been a special education teacher for the past 8 years. I fell in love with special education working as a teacher assistant and went on to get my licensure to become a special education teacher. Through my years working in special education I have learned to understand the impact and importance of providing quality services for the students, especially students who are from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds. A huge number of students in special education are Black and Brown students who look like people in my communities and me. Special education became much more than a career choice, but as a way to help my own BIPOC communities.

Next, my name is Elvira Elfrida and I am also a special education teacher. Despite this is my first year teaching, I have been active in education for close to 10 years. During the years being an educator, I have been witnessing that many students are BIPOC (Black and Indegineous People of Color) whom the majority are the Special Education population. I, also witnessing that our special education population is not being treated equally like our general education population. We soon realized that this was not only about educating these young men and women on academic matters such as math, science, and reading, but it is equally as important to teach them to self-advocate, build perseverance and engage in their communities to be successful in life. These students were no longer my students, but my brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews.

Every year we find our energy diminishing and hope fading as we struggle to maintain the quality of services that students deserve because of the lack of support, either from a systemic or financial framework. Every year it has become harder and

harder to find paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, or educational assistants to support the students and staff at school, thus putting more and more pressure on special education teachers to maintain quality services while avoiding job burnout. This has now become an impossible task and field to get into or continue without the constant strain on our mental and physical health. We often find ourselves wondering at what point will we get the much deserved support, break, or guidance from people who can make a difference. Often times we hear calls and preaches for representation in our teacher demographics to match the students whom we service, and yet the system doesn't provide a way to support those who are brave enough to dive into this field.

We are calling for our legislators to make a difference and support us. The time is **NOW** to fully fund special education programs and help to support teachers and staff who are still braving every day to make a difference in the lives of our students, especially those of our BIPOC students.