

March 10th, 2021

Rep. Ruth Richardson
Chair MN House Committee on Education Policy
Subject: HF 1081
403 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Written Testimony Submission (HF 1081)
Teach For America - Twin Cities

I, Claire Jackson Stumbras, the Chief Program Officer of Teach For America Twin Cities, submit the following comments to be considered by the House Committee on Education Policy regarding HF 1081.

Context on Teach For America

Teach for America has been operating in Minnesota since 2009. Our mission is to ensure that all students have access to an excellent education. As an AmeriCorps program, our corps members start with a two year commitment to provide rigorous and excellent instruction as classroom educators. As program alum, corps members continue to have a lifetime commitment to advance education equity and advocate for youth.

To date, TFA Twin Cities has trained over 300 teachers. For the past three years, 30% - 45% of our first and second year teachers have been teachers of color. Also during this duration, our 3-year retention rate in education has been over 85%. For the past 7 years TFA Twin Cities has hosted an annual recruitment event to attract experienced teachers, administrators, principals, and school and system leaders to Minnesota. To date, we have engaged close to 200 teachers and leaders in the event. See below for a summary of the impact this event has had on the talent landscape in the twin cities.

- 25% - Average percent of participants identifying as people of color
- 32% - Percent of participants licensed in shortage area (Special Ed, English as a Second Language, STEM)
- 57% - Average percent of participants who accept a job offer and move to the Twin Cities within 6 months

Through these efforts and our program, there are now over 900+ TFA alumni in MN. Close to 70% of these still work in education with the vast majority working in the K-12 as classroom educators, support staff, and administrators. As an organization that has a long-standing and vested interest in the education landscape in MN, we look forward to submitting the recommendations below.

Testimony Regarding HF 1081

While this bill is comprehensive and we agree with a subset of the recommendations, we would like to highlight some of the significant concerns we have regarding the changes to sections concerning tiered licensure.

Teacher diversity is a significant area of concern in the state of MN - where too many students of color do not have access to teachers and leaders who reflect their own identities. As a state, we must continue to advocate for and advance policy that will both diversify our teaching force and ensure each student has access to a high quality, effective teacher.

As written, this bill removes the coursework pathway that teacher applicants can use to pursue a Tier 2 license in the state. This is a critical pathway for out-of-state teachers who have taught for at least two years to pursue a license in Minnesota. In addition, the bill removes the pathway to move from a Tier 2 to a Tier 3 license by teaching 3 or more years on a Tier 2 license with a satisfactory performance review. We fear these changes would significantly reduce the ability of both in state and out of state candidates to enter the teaching profession and work toward a portable license in our state. These changes would significantly limit pathway options and we believe, in practice, would remove many effective and dedicated educators from the classroom.

The Tier 2 to Tier 3 pathway, that this bill would remove, provides a way for individuals who have demonstrated that they are effective educators to get permanent licenses. These teachers must first secure a Tier 2 license, satisfy requirements for the initial renewal of a Tier 2 license, and complete three years of teaching that demonstrates effectiveness through satisfactory evaluations. It has been three years since our state passed our tiered licensure system. There are high-quality Tier 2 teachers who are in their third year and, if this pathway is removed, they would not be allowed to receive the Tier 3 license they have been working towards and that would allow them to stay in the classroom.

Currently, 21% of individuals teaching on a Tier 2 license are teachers of color. Closing this pathway would remove a way for many of our state's teachers of color to get permanent licensure and would require many quality teachers in our state to navigate additional financial, time, and system barriers in order to secure a license. This pathway allows for quality educators who are meeting the standards of their local leaders and boards to continue teaching on a Tier 3 license without needing to overcome additional barriers. Additionally, this proposed change would only further exacerbate challenges that districts and schools are experiencing with attracting and retaining qualified teachers ([PELSB MN Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2021](#)) at a time when we need qualified teachers to address COVID-19 related impact on student learning and academic achievement.

As the tiered licensure law currently stands, we believe that there are appropriate checks and balances in place to ensure that as a state we are able to first, ensure all teachers are qualified to be in front of students and second, ensure that we have multiple and expansive pathway options that allow us to fill classrooms with diverse and dedicated teachers. The proposed changes would result in a substantial shift in our licensure system. Before making such a substantial shift, we would expect to see clear and abundant evidence that our relatively new system is not operating as originally intended. Put plainly - we should not be adding additional barriers for dedicated teachers without clear evidence that these barriers will improve outcomes for students.

In addition to our primary concerns regarding tiered licensure, we have an additional concern regarding license renewal. The bill states that, "The board may adopt and revise rule setting criteria for initial Tier 3 license renewal requirements that must be completed before a teacher may move to a Tier 4 license". We do not believe this belongs in rule making, if there are additional requirements for a Tier 3 renewal prior to applying for a Tier 4 it should be passed in statute.

We thank the members of the committee for reviewing our comments and look forward to continuing conversations with representatives regarding the potential impacts of this bill.

Sincerely,

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One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

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