

February 27, 2024

Chair Cheryl Youakim
Minnesota House Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Driver Education Program Access Expanded for Low-Income Students (HF3360/Clardy)

Chair Youakim and Members,

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage and East Metro Civic Alliance write in support of HF3360, the proposal to expand low-income student access to driver education programs.

Correlations between driver's education and household income illustrate the ways achievement gaps are rooted in opportunity gaps. Studies show that teens from wealthy homes are 51 percent more likely to have a license than low-income teens¹. While all households recognize that driving is costly, low-income households are overwhelmed by the costs. In a recent survey, 33 percent of parents making less than \$50k per year say driving expenses prevented their teen from getting licensed. No parent making \$100k or more, who responded to that survey, identified cost as a reason their teen didn't drive.

HF3360 addresses the preceding socioeconomic divide by establishing driver education grants to cover a portion of the costs for a student who qualifies for a free or reduced-price meal. To the extent the grants reduce the financial burdens on low-income households, the bill will help expand driver's license access for Minnesotans in African Heritage communities. In Minnesota as elsewhere, the impacts of poverty on children and students are deeply racialized. Federal and state data indicate that, while less than 10 percent of non-Hispanic White children experience poverty, 25 percent of Black children live in poor households². The disaggregated data shows even greater inequality. The poverty rate is 57 percent for children from Somali Minnesotan households, 39 percent for children from Ethiopian Minnesotan households, and 32 percent for children from U.S.-born African American families in Minnesota³.

¹ The Zebra ["Study: The cost of teen driving hits low-income families hardest"](#) (March 30, 2023); Pacific Standard ["Driver's Ed Is Becoming Harder for Poor Kids to Afford"](#) (January 16, 2018).

² Susan Brower et al ["The Economic Status of Minnesotans 2023"](#) (March 2023, MN State Demographic Center).

³ Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota ["Minnesota Kids Count 2020: Building Bridges to Economic Stability for Children and Families"](#) (November 2020); MinnPost ["A report ranks Minnesota third for child well-being, but there are big gaps between white children and children of color"](#) (June 24, 2021).

Access to driver's education can increase one's prospects for enjoying health and wellness, public safety, and upward labor mobility. For many, licensed driving means greater access to better quality jobs, housing, health care, education, and food resources. The Minnesota economy is best served when our state invests in measures that expand these resource opportunities. HF3360 is a step in this direction. We thank Rep. Clardy for bringing this bill forward.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan | Executive Director
Theodore Rose | Policy Director
Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage

Eric Clark | Board Chair
East Metro Civic Alliance



The Minnesota Legislature empowered the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social, and economic resources, policies, and procedures of the State of Minnesota. Generally, the Council is charged with the responsibility of:

- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on issues confronting People of African Heritage;*
- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on statutes, rules, and revisions to programs to ensure that Black people have access to benefits and services provided to people in Minnesota;*
- *Serving as a liaison to the federal government, local government units and private organizations on matters relating to People of African Heritage in Minnesota;*
- *Implementing programs designed to solve problems of People of African Heritage when authorized by statute, rule, or order; and*

Publicizing the accomplishments of People of African Heritage and their contributions to the state.