

February 28, 2019

Representative Cheryl Youakim

591 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

rep.cheryl.youakim@house.mn sent via email

Dear Representative Youakim,

Because you chair the House Education Policy Committee, we, as board members of Black Men Teach, are reaching out to make sure you are aware of our strong concerns with

HF 1329. Black Men Teach is a community initiative designed to increase the number of black male educators in the elementary grades. We are sure you are aware of the importance of this work; recent studies show that having just one black male teacher reduces the likelihood of persistently low-income black male student from dropping out of school by 39%. Working with a consortium of K-12 schools, institutions of higher education and community-based organizations, we are seeking to significantly increase their presence in our classrooms.

HF 1329 would have numerous unintended consequences, including the potential removal of 23 percent of existing teachers of color from Minnesota classrooms simply because they hold a tier 1 or tier 2 license. And at the same time, stripping school leaders of flexibility to hire the best, most diverse educators, and ultimately forcing Minnesota students to lose out on great teachers.

For too long, Minnesota’s licensure system deterred high-quality, diverse teachers from classrooms that need them. Licensure added to the many other barriers teachers of color had to face, contributing to Minnesota’s low teacher diversity rates. Streamlining pathways to the classroom for educators of color through acknowledging the value, skills and experience teachers of color bring will benefit educators and, most importantly, students

Instead of re-erecting licensure barriers for educators, we need to focus on better supporting and retaining them, which is the work of Black Men Teach. Instead of advancing HF 1329, please work with us to improve on-the-job supports and equitable professional development opportunities for teachers so that they can grow professionally and have the greatest possible impact on Minnesota students. We must all be proactive in recruiting educators of color - which is why Black Men Teach supports the Teachers of Color Act - while defending the right of educators of color to stay in the classroom which is why we oppose HF1329.  Our students, especially our students of color, deserve no less.

Respectfully,

The Board of Black Men Teach

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Hopkins School District

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