



Minnesota House of Representatives
Early Childhood Finance & Policy Division Committee
March 14, 2019

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Somali Autism Mom and Advocate – In support of HR 1785

Dear Mr. Chair Pinto and Members, Good Morning (I hope it is still morning when you hear HF 1785)

Many thanks for the opportunity to testify today. I appreciate your time.

My name is Idil Abdull and I have a son who has nonverbal autism. As you may know, autism is a developmental disability that affects the ability to communicate, social skills, sensory and behavior regulation skills. 1 in 59 children have autism nationwide and 1 in 26 have autism in Minnesota according to eleven CDC funded states which include Minnesota.

My son who does not understand cause/effect and is profoundly affected by autism was suspended by Principal Jaysen Anderson in Bloomington Public Schools. I will never forget the day this happened as it has profoundly affected our whole family emotionally, physically and financially.

The right to not be discriminated against based on race, color or national origin are supposed to be guaranteed by The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI (Browne, 2002). This same right was extended to students with disabilities under the IDEA Act of 2004. Yet, students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined. There are many reasons for this racial disparity but one that stands out for me is implicit bias. What is implicit bias and how does it impact or contribute to discipline disparities? Researchers at Yale University investigated this and found that when subjects were asked to watch a video of children (black boy, black girl, white boy, white girl) displaying challenging behaviors, teachers gazed longer at black children especially black boys. The severity of the discipline was also higher when the race of the student and the teacher did not match. Teachers were watching black boys longer waiting and expecting the worst (Gilliam, 2016). Think about this for a minute. A recent analysis by the Tribune stated

that while students of color rate have grown to be 34%, teachers of color are only 5%. Sadly, our students are paying the price for this as Minnesota has a shameful discipline racial disparity.

We need to change this trajectory so that a child is a child is a child irrespective of his/her race, ethnicity, color or disability. Parents send their children to school to learn and be nurtured. When children are kicked out of school, we are telling them they are not important enough and we are telling their families the same thing as discipline disparity affects the whole family in the short and long term.

They say insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results. Minnesota must do something different. I think this legislation (HF 1785) is the right first step. I would even add implicit bias training for educators. I am hopeful and confident that we will decrease and eliminate this horrible statistic for the sake of our children and our state. Children are not perfect as adults are also not perfect. The goal is to teach each child to the best of their ability in not just academics, but how to become a productive member of society.

I thank the author and all of you. I hope that you will vote for this legislation.

