

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members.

My name is Nan Silkunas and I am a resident of Owatonna, MN. I also identify as a person with a disability and a teacher.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I am Autistic and a licensed Developmental Adapted Physical Education teacher. Special education criteria, evaluation, and programming often focus on student impairments or differences rather than environmental, social, and instructional access barriers. The lived experiences of members of the disability community should inform special education instruction. Training teachers about ableism and disability justice has the potential to create more inclusive educational spaces and greater educational equity.

I ask for your support of HF4159.

Sincerely,

Nan Silkunas
Owatonna, MN, 55060

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members.

My name is Heather Evans and I am a resident of Edina, MN. I am also a teacher.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because ableism is the greatest challenge faced by people with disabilities. I believe that teachers working with students with disabilities need to have an understanding of ableism and the principles of disability justice form an important framework which centers the voices of the most impacted. Teachers working with students with disabilities should have a basic understanding of the principals of disability justice.

Educators are under a tremendous amount of stress and spread far too thin. The community of adults with disabilities is an incredible resource that should be involved in the education of students with disabilities.

Please support HF4159.

Sincerely,

Heather Evans
Edina, MN 55416

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Alison Fox and I am a resident of Bloomington, MN.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I am an Early Childhood Special Education and early intervention teacher. The topic of Ableism is given space superficially most often i.e. use of identity first rather than person first language as it pertains to the neurodivergent population. The ability to learn from those whose learning style and experience are neurodivergent gives needed context to why this is so relevant for those of us who are neurotypical.

I have a child who is neurodivergent and a dad who is neurodivergent. The consequence of the status quo on educating with Ableism at center places the onus on those who are marginalized to advocate for themselves in a way that looks and sounds different from others. Incorporating this into education universalizes other learning styles, ways of thinking and being, and promotes those of us with access to learning in a more adaptable style. One caveat is the quality of the training needs attention as this will be paramount to the overall success of the addition of this to the teacher training, and its use and impact for future instruction.

I ask for your support of HF4159.

Sincerely,

Alisn Fox
Bloomington, MN 55438

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members,

My name is Emily Gresbrink and I am a resident of Saint Paul, MN. I also identify as a person with a disability and the parent of a person with a disability.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because ableism is a form of discrimination.

Sincerely,

Emily Gresbrink
Saint Paul, MN, 55106

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Rev. Hannah Campbell Gustafson and I am a resident of Minneapolis, MN. I also am the parent of a person with a disability.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This past Monday, my 5 year old daughter received a diagnosis of autism. Though we thought this might be the case (thus the evaluation), the actual diagnosis is proving hard for my spouse and me to metabolize. I imagine it will take some time.

This diagnosis doesn't change who my daughter is, or how deeply I love her. But at the moment, one of my biggest fears is that her teachers now and in the future won't see all of her incredible gifts and strengths, but instead will see the label, the diagnosis, and think of it in terms of her deficits. This would be so easy for them to do--our teachers are all overworked, and our society as a whole is so deficit-oriented and ableist, so it makes sense that teachers would live out what our society as a whole says.

This bill is a crucial step in mitigating my biggest fears. All of our kids who are disabled by our society deserve to have teachers who understand their own ableism and the importance of disability justice, and who have learned from adults with a disability. This is the kind of society I want to live in.

Sincerely,

Rev. Hannah Campbell Gustafson
Minneapolis MN 55407

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Rachel Biggs and I am a resident of Bloomington, MN. I also identify as a person with a disability and I am a teacher.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I am a teacher who retired due to a disability. After becoming disabled, I've realized how natural ableism is when talking about "differences."

Sincerely,

Rachel Biggs
Bloomington, MN 55437

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Sarah Carlson-Wallrath and I am a resident of Minnetonka, MN. I am also a parent of a person with a disability.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I am the mother of an autistic middle schooler. Throughout his educational career, he has had many caring and well intentioned educators. However, the lens through which most of the people who worked with him was limited. They did not fully grasp his potential and did not expect him to reach proficiency in reading, math or other academic endeavors. When my son was not reading in 4th grade we removed him from school and I became his teacher for the next three years. I had high expectations for his reading growth and along with high expectations, structured instruction and respect for his neurology, we worked together every day on academic skills. At the end of those three years, he surpassed even my elevated expectations for him. He returned to school in 7th grade as a reader.

Learning that most of us hold negative viewpoints about the potential of people with disabilities severely limits people like my son's exposure to opportunities to learn, demonstrate their potential, and participate in the community as an equal to his peers. This bill would help reset the expectation model for students receiving special education services in our schools. Learning about our biases is a crucial step in changing our special education system for the better - so that we all recognize when our outdated models are limiting the potential of some of our most disadvantaged students.

I ask for your support of HF4159.

Sincerely,

Sarah Carlson-Wallrath
Minnetonka, MN 55305

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Elizabeth Marsh and I am a resident of Mora, MN.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I am a parent of a child with a disability.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Marsh
Mora, MN 55051

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Shannon Peterson and I am a resident of Springfield, MN.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because My daughter is disabled & has been denied her educational rights all through school, currently in 8th grade. She reads at a 4th grade level. If teachers heard from the children it affects, maybe they would understand the importance of them in their teaching profession, to support & advocate for these kids. Administration should also be required to receive training on ableism as public education is a service (paid for by us as taxpayers) & not a business.

I ask for your support of HF4159.

Sincerely,

Shannon Peterson
Springfield MN 56087

March 17, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members. My name is Marianne Baum and I am a resident of Minneapolis MN 55406, MN. I also identify as a person with a disability.

I am writing to you today to ask for your support for House File 4159, which addresses the need for teachers working with students with disabilities to receive training and ableism and disability justice from a person with a disability.

This issue is important to me because I was so unaware throughout my public school education (even in college) that ableism was a thing, and not only was it a thing, it was a major barrier to my success. I dropped out of school eventually. Never got my degree and now my loans are in default. I am dynamically disabled and in worse shape than before, so having no degree means no ability to do the kind of work I actually could do with proper education/training, and very little prospects for doing any other kind of work due to the nature of my disabilities. Had I been empowered from a young age to accept and name my disabilities and stand up against ableism (for myself and others), it would have been a different story. I could have gone to school for Public Health and done the kind of research and advocacy that are now inaccessible to me.

Please support HF4159.

Sincerely,

Marianne Baum
Minneapolis MN 55406

Chair Pryor and Education Policy Committee Members,

Thank you for your consideration of HF 4159. As the parent of an autistic teenager, learning from neurodiverse people had made the greatest impact on my parenting. Ableism is so entrenched in our culture that it is very difficult to talk about disabled people and disability justice from non disabled or non neurodiverse people.

My child is a junior in High School. We have had a lot of good teachers over the years. However, the teachers who have **best understood** and **best supported his learning have been autistic.**

I recently moderated a presentation "Utilizing Autistic Expertise in Improving Therapy Services for Autistic Clients" that might be of interest to your committee. This free link is for your personal use only. In it I explain why learning from Autistic people is crucial and then an Autistic Educator and an Autistic OT share their personal and professional expertise.

Please support HF 4159. It would help students like my son learn so much better. Sincerely,

Leah Harp, LCSW, PhD

<https://www.icsw.edu/event-2024-autism-munch-learn-feb29>



COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

1600 University Avenue W, Suite 8, St. Paul, MN 55104
651-361-7800 | www.disability.state.mn.us

Honorable Chair Representative Laurie Pryor
House Education Policy Committee
March 19th, 2024
HF 4159 – Ableism & Disability Justice in Schools

Chair Pryor and members of the House Education Committee,

The Minnesota Council on Disability would like to express our strong support for HF 4159, legislation that directs teachers to include instruction on ableism and disability justice in their classrooms. This bill represents progress towards an inclusive and equitable educational system.

Ableism, characterized by the discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities, remains one of the most significant barriers to their full and equal participation in society. The dialogue surrounding ableism and disability justice is not only pertinent but vital to the disability community. By equipping educators with a comprehensive understanding of these issues, we can foster an environment where all students, including students with disabilities, are valued and supported.

Teachers who work with students with disabilities face immense pressures and are often overstretched. Experienced adults with disabilities, rich in empathy and understanding, are ready as a valuable resource. Their involvement in the education of students with disabilities can offer unique insights and strategies that promote inclusion and justice.

It is imperative to recognize that excluding the lived experience of those most affected by educational policies and practices is a profound oversight. Such exclusion is seldom tolerated in discussions about other marginalized groups; it should be equally unacceptable for students with disabilities. Involvement of the disability community in these discussions is not only beneficial but necessary for creating educational approaches that truly address the needs and rights of all students.

The pervasive nature of ableism in educational settings can be deeply disheartening and can discourage the educational and vocational dreams of students with disabilities. However, it also provides us with clear direction for change. By introducing future educators to the concepts of ableism and disability justice, we pave the way for a more understanding, accessible, and just educational in our state.

The Minnesota Council on Disability urges the members of the House Education Policy Committee to recognize the importance of HF 4159 and to support its passage. Together, we can work towards an education system that celebrates Minnesotans with disabilities and dismantles the systemic barriers erected by ignorance and prejudice, as well as be a model for the rest of the country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor Turner".

Trevor Turner
Public Policy Director
trevor.turner@state.mn.us

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Dively".

David Dively
Executive Director
david.dively@state.mn.us

March 18, 2024

Re: The Arc Minnesota, Letter of Support HF 4159

Chair Pryor and members of the House Education Policy Committee,

The Arc Minnesota strongly supports House File 4159, which would require training on ableism and disability justice by a person with a disability as a requirement of teacher licensure for all teachers working with students with disabilities.

Founded by parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in 1946, The Arc Minnesota is a statewide nonprofit advocacy organization that promotes and protects the human rights of individuals with IDD, supporting them and their families in a lifetime of full inclusion and participation in their communities. We are a chapter of The Arc of the United States, the largest national community-based organization advocating for people with IDD and their families.

Ableism is one of the most important obstacles faced by people with disabilities. An understanding of ableism and disability justice is essential to the lives of people with disabilities, yet teacher licensing requirements do not currently require that teachers supporting students with disabilities receive any training on ableism or disability justice. There are also currently no requirements that teachers teaching students with disabilities receive any training by adults with disabilities. No other marginalized group is similarly excluded from discussions about how to support their community. The knowledge and experience of adults with disabilities is an essential yet underutilized resource that will be incredibly beneficial to all educators.

By incorporating ableism and disability justice into special education teacher training, we will raise awareness around ableism and begin to address disability stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Students with disabilities deserve to feel welcomed, known, and seen. This bill will help support teachers to create an environment where all students thrive.

The Arc Minnesota is grateful to Representative Hicks for introducing this bill and graciously ask for your support. The passage of HF 4159 would represent significant progress addressing ableism and signal your commitment to supporting people with disabilities who deserve to be included in discussions on how best to support their community.

Sincerely,

Tina Rucci

Public Policy Director

The Arc Minnesota



March 15, 2024

Chair Laurie Pryor
House Education Policy Committee
MN House of Representatives

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF4159

Dear Chair Pryor and Committee Members,

We are writing to share our strong support for HF 4159 which addresses training on ableism and disability justice by a person with a disability as part of the teacher licensure requirements.

As parents of children with disabilities, we know that ableism is one of the great obstacles our children face. An honest discussion about ableism, disability justice, the stigma around disability and our own implicit biases are an incredibly important part of supporting children with disabilities, and these conversations should be led by people with disabilities. Yet there is currently no requirement that these conversations take place as part of training people who educate students with disabilities, and there is no requirement that people with disabilities in any way inform or be involved in that training.

As parents, the greatest “intervention” we have pursued for our children is becoming friends with disabled adults. We want teachers to have access to that same wisdom and honest discussions which have so greatly benefited our own families, and we urge your support of HF4159.

Sincerely,

Multicultural Autism Action Network

Fatima Molas
Delia Samuel
Rufo Jiru
Maren Christenson Hofer

www.maanmn.org