

April 7, 2021-HF 993

Dear Chair Bernardy and Honorable Members of the House Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for your careful consideration of the proposals in H.F. 1041, the higher education proposals for the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act. These higher education proposals complement the E12 proposals needed to meaningfully increase the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) to reflect our state's increasingly diverse student population.

We applaud the significant increased investments for student teacher candidates who are of color and American Indian. Unpaid student teaching is among the most significant barriers to the profession for BIPOC candidates, and this investment will meaningfully enhance recruitment and retention of TOCAIT.

While the DE amendment for H.F. 993 does not exactly mirror the policies of H.F. 1041, we appreciate the inclusion of important provisions for administration and reporting as proposed in H.F. 1041 for the two student teacher grant programs, which were carefully crafted with extensive stakeholder and agency feedback.

We also appreciate the creation of the Aspiring Minnesota Educators of Color Scholarship Program with policy language from H.F. 1041, along with initial funding. While the \$4.5 million investment over the biennium for these scholarships is far short of the \$26.4 million proposed for these scholarships in H.F. 1041, this appropriation will still support at least 200 candidates each year. However, much more will be needed in future budgets if the state intends to increase the percentage of TOCAIT in our schools to match the increasing diversity of our students.

We are disappointed that important policy amendments and investments for the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness program did not make it in your omnibus bill. TOCAIT, like other educators, often carry substantial student loan debt and the current administration of the program does not ensure equitable awarding of funds to TOCAIT. Meanwhile, the current program does not focus support on the most severe licensure shortage areas in the state or within specific economic development regions. Increased focus in these areas would maximum returns on investment and would serve to strengthen our state.

We thank you for your prioritization of these investments and policies and ask that they remain a top priority during negotiations with the Senate in conference committee. Thank you for your leadership in forging a stronger education system for all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Shannon Geshick | Executive Director | Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

Rosa Tock | Executive Director | Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

Sia Her | Executive Director | Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans

Linda Sloan | Executive Director | Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage