

January 27, 2021

Honorable Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, and Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage have the important role as state agencies to advise and inform elected officials about our constituent communities and their needs. Students from our communities currently represent 35% of all students in schools across Minnesota. Moreover, our communities continue to endure a well-documented and widely reported disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in various economic, health, and education measures.

While our state's overall population continues to grow increasingly diverse, the severe shortage of TOCAIT remains persistently stagnant. It is then with great urgency that we write today to ask that you support the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (H.F. 217), which has been the top education priority that has united our four Councils since the Increase Teachers of Color Act was first introduced in 2017.

In 2016 state law, several statutes were amended to ensure that all students have "improved and equitable access to effective and diverse teachers" who reflect the diversity of students in their schools. Providing all students with equitable access to teachers of color and indigenous teachers is something our state has yet to do in order to narrow our state's persistent opportunity and achievement gaps, which are among the worst in the country for our constituent communities. As a state, we have yet to take serious systemic action and must do things differently to truly achieve improved results in narrowing equity gaps, including addressing the persistent shortage of TOCAIT.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you fully support H.F. 217, which will strengthen program investments and address systemic barriers to TOCAIT recruitment, preparation, and retention while also addressing factors that contribute to achievement gaps that deeply impact students from our communities. The comprehensive set of policy proposals in H.F. 217 have been informed by feedback from hundreds of members and educators from our communities over the past five years and has been vetted and endorsed by dozens of organizations that often do not agree on various educational issues.

A key provision in this bill would require districts to have plans to ensure that curriculum is "rigorous, accurate, anti-racist, and culturally sustaining" and that learning and work environments "validate, embrace, affirm, and integrate the cultural and community strengths for all students, families, and employees."

Lastly, this comprehensive policy proposal is directly aligned with recommendations included in the report by the House Select Committee on Racial Justice and ensures that there is urgency at all levels to intentionally and legitimately address the state's chronic shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers.

Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right for the success of all students by fully supporting H.F. 217.

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