



16 March 2021

Good Morning Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel, McCarty and Fellow Members of the Education Committee. We wish to extend a special greeting to the members of the committee who represent our Fairfield community, Representatives Devlin and Leeper:

My name is Ian Leighton and I am the Chair of the Writing and Analysis Committee for the Fairfield Equity Coalition, a youth-led organization taking local action to advocate for educational equity within Fairfield Public Schools. I am testifying in partial support of SB 1034 *An Act Concerning Minority Recruitment and Retention* on behalf of the Fairfield Equity Coalition. This legislation would make the crucial work of diversifying Connecticut educators a state-wide initiative, an effort that was previously left largely up to local and regional municipalities. Our coalition is supportive of several of the bill's provisions and its overall goal to increase diversity within the teaching staff of Connecticut but we hold three stipulations to our full support of the bill: that (1) the minority retention program be expansive in scope, (2) promotion of the education profession be based on the transformative power of education, and (3) the bias in hiring practices training be based on active engagement and group activity.

We are entirely supportive of the ultimate goal behind this proposed legislation. Leading academic thought on anti-racism in education reveals the importance of racial diversity in a school's teaching staff. Representation is one of the essential aspects of learning needed for a student's success within the classroom. To have a reflection of one's self provides safety and comfort to a student in the classroom. When Black, Indigenous, and other students of color see people like themselves leading their classroom, they are more likely to engage with course material on a deeper level and are less likely to be unfairly disciplined because of overt or unconscious bias from a teacher. Seeing yourself reflected in your environment - particularly one of learning and growth - sends the message that you belong, not in a passive manner but in a substantial and inclusive way.

Students of all races gain from a diverse teaching faculty. Children benefit from knowing that authority figures and role models can be people who are different than themselves and that they can learn from said difference. For students of color, this diversity can provide a sense of motivation and security from a shared sense of identity. Across the board, students tend to perform better when their teachers are racially diverse.

A school environment that accurately reflects the diversity of a community will allow both students and faculty to feel comfortable with their own identity, enhancing a teacher's interpersonal relationships with students, parents and colleagues.

It is our hope that the minority candidate certification program is not only passed into law but

expansive in scope, providing *several* positions per district across a wide range of environments. Adequate funding must be allocated to support a robust certification program with the potential for growth if initial data on its effectiveness reflect a true diversification of new hires across the state.

Promoting the teaching profession to our high school students is an effective way to expose burgeoning adults, particularly those from underfunded and neglected school districts, to the nobility and importance of teaching while showing them they are capable of doing so. Although the state has a vested interest in promoting teaching for its own benefit, this effort should be framed in the larger context of the transformative power of education. A power that *any* person can wield to become a curious, culturally-competent and engaged citizen. The goal of education should be to develop a love of learning for the sake of learning itself. FEC views these principles as the paramounts of public education. Any promotion of the profession, therefore, ought to be framed as developing the next generation of educators and their eventual students with these ideals in mind.

In our own advocacy, FEC promotes a wide range of professional development for faculty and staff. We are inherently wary of trainings done exclusively through video platforms, as such a medium is passive and potentially unengaging. We argue in favor of developing training programs that include active engagement and group activity. We urge the relevant parties as outlined in SB 1034 to develop an engaging and interactive training truthful to the leading research on bias in hiring practices that extends beyond pressing play on a video.

It is with our unwavering caveats above that the Fairfield Equity Coalition casts our partial support of this important initiative to develop the infrastructure necessary for the diversification of Connecticut educators. We hope the reasons for our qualified support are seriously considered during the deliberation process.

On behalf of the Fairfield Equity Coalition, we thank the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today on SB 1034.