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Testimony before the Senate Education Committee and

Senate Higher Education Committee

Re: Teacher Diversity

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Good morning, my name is Sean Spiller. I am a high school science teacher currently serving as the Vice President of the New Jersey Education Association. Thank you for inviting NJEA to testify on the topic of teacher diversity. The NJEA supports efforts to diversify New Jersey's teacher workforce. We also believe that diversity is important among all job categories in our public schools.

On December 6, 2018, S-703 was referred to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. A-3141, an identical bill, was reported out of the Assembly Education Committee, with amendments, on the same day. These bills establish a pilot program in the NJDOE to recruit minority men to teach in targeted schools through the alternate route program.

NJEA supports S-703 and A-3141 and believes they are an important first step in attempting to diversify our educational workforce. It must be noted that they must be followed by efforts to comprehensively address the need for diversification of teaching staff in *all* of New Jersey's public schools. The proposed legislation is a step in the right direction, but we will need to do more in order to support the needs of our diverse student population.

In 2014, the Center for American Progress (CAP) cited over one hundred research studies and articles that indicate that the building of a diverse teacher workforce is critical to students' academic success. The studies expound on the National Education Association's (NEA) findings during the same year that teachers of color tend to provide more culturally relevant teaching and better understand the situations that students of color may face.

The NEA's findings are supported by hundreds of research studies and program developments centered around Culturally Responsive Teaching - a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Not only is it important to include Culturally Responsive Teaching for students for their overall academic benefit, such pedagogy is important in both k-12 and in teacher preparation programs to recruit and retain educators of color.

Additionally, the NJEA has been working with partner organizations, like the Center for Future Educators and The College of New Jersey to actively recruit teachers of color for the profession.

This has entailed both inviting and encouraging students of color to attend the trainings and college visits and also financially supporting school districts to overcome the disproportionate financial difficulties sometimes found in our communities of color.

This will need to be a broader area of focus for the legislature and teacher preparation programs. The active recruitment of educators of color and the financial assistance then offered. As we know, all of this will be important, in part because of the changing composition of our student body in New Jersey but also because of the evidence that shows the importance of seeing a teacher a student can relate to or having exposure to someone different than a student identifies.

In a separate report, the NEA outlines supporting data that shows the percentage of students of color exceeded that of white students in U.S. public schools for the first time in 2014.

The CAP also references the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, “Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline” that found, “Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. On average, 5% of white students are suspended, compared to 16% of black students.”

These report magnify our concerns that during the 2015-16 school year, 54% of New Jersey students identified as non-white, while only 15% of our teachers identified as the same.

National research studies identify New Jersey as lacking diversity in our educational workforce New Jersey’s percentages of educators of color have remained stagnant. In fact, those percentages increasingly lag behind the percentages of students of color in our public schools. Not only have we *not* fixed the problem, it’s getting worse.

School districts across the state are having trouble recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty. Significant increases in health insurance contributions, reductions in pension benefits, and increased work responsibilities are only a few of the conditions that have made the teaching profession a less attractive career choice in general for all college students.

The high cost of attending colleges and universities, and achieving teacher certification, is not offset by potential income after entering the education profession and the edTPA performance assessment, that may replace the PRAXIS test, takes considerably longer to prepare for and cost more than the PRAXIS.

The overall candidate pool of educators has been significantly reduced. The number of candidates of color within that pool is smaller still.

It should also be noted that historically there has been a lack of employment opportunities offered to educators of color in many districts where students of color are not largely represented in the student population.

Not only does this discourage minority educators from applying in such districts, but it discourages minority educators from entering the profession, as they are acutely aware that their employment opportunities are significantly limited.

NJEA has researched national and state statistics on teacher diversity and has initiated supports, adopted policy developed by the governing bodies of our organization, and studied the outline, actions, and goals of the Diverse and Learner-Ready Teacher Initiative designed to reach a desired outcome by 2025. The DLRT has developed a plan, which the NJDOE may be outlining in their testimony.

The NJEA has attended work sessions with the Council of Chief State School Officers in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education, and various institutions of higher education in an effort to increase racial diversity in the teacher workforce so that it is representative of all K-12 students in our state.

We have partnered with Stockton University to form a conference for 11th and 12th grade students of color to learn about the teaching profession and the importance of diversity in education. During this conference, students will have an opportunity to interact with educators, hear from college level education students, and present ideas that would have made their educational experience better.

Additionally, NJEA's Equity Alliance contains five committees: Human and Civil Rights, Women in Education, Urban Education, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and Minority Leadership and Recruitment. These committees ensure that we remain cognizant of the issues that affect our students' educational experience pertaining to diversity. This allows educators of color the space to share ideas and focus on issues culturally relevant and important to serving their students and their own personal experiences.

The NJEA Minority Leadership & Recruitment Committee encourages multi-ethnic members to become actively involved in all levels of Association work. It also identifies and recommends ways to attract multi-ethnic members to school employee professions and develops and initiates training opportunities for school personnel.

In 2015, the NJEA Delegate Assembly adopted the following resolution: NJEA believes school districts, the N.J. Department of Education (NJDOE), and other state agencies should promote, achieve, and maintain ethnic diversity in all categories of educational employment and recognize that multi-ethnic teaching staffs are essential to the operation of schools. NJEA urges its local and county affiliates, NJDOE, and other state agencies to work to achieve this goal.

NJEA strives to ensure that all teachers in the workforce demonstrate culturally responsive practices and restorative practices by providing extensive professional development and workshop opportunities on those topics.

We also provide continuous support to educators such as assistance with understanding job requirements and evaluations, legal advice, networking opportunities, grant writing assistance, and many other supports that encourage job retention.

The teaching profession must be an attractive and viable career choice for students of color entering college. Recommendations to explore include:

- Supporting the teaching profession in general by-passing legislation such as S-2606, a bill that imposes a cap on public employee health care benefit contributions.
- Mandating that colleges and universities offering teacher certification programs develop policy that requires the deliberate and aggressive recruitment, and retention, of people of color in those programs. Recruitment strategies include provide information about the teaching profession to targeted student groups. Organizations to address may include The Black Student Union, Women of Color, The Hispanic /Latino Student Association, The Asian Pacific -Islander Student Union, student chapters of the NAACP, 100 Black Men, fraternities, sororities, and all other groups whose mission supports student members of color.
- Incentivizing entering the profession by offering loan forgiveness and providing grant opportunities that cover expenses and housing for people of color who enter teaching certification programs.
- Offering 100% portable tenure for minority educators who maintain highly-effective scores on yearly performance evaluations.
- Offering cost incentives to students of color taking the edTPA performance assessment.
- Effective educator training is also needed to ensure success. Training topics include, but are not limited to, classroom management strategies, culturally responsive curriculum, cultural competency, and restorative practices.

According to a 2017 analysis by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, National statistics show that New Jersey is already America's sixth most segregated state for black students and the seventh most segregated for Latino students. ALL of New Jersey's schools need a diverse teaching staff, not just our urban districts.

All students who interact with a diverse group of adults during their school experience as adolescents, achieve a more well-rounded education and develop a broader world view as they journey into adulthood. The lack of diversity in New Jersey's teaching staff creates a deficit of adult role models who inherently understand the cultural responsiveness and pedagogy required for our students of color to succeed.

We welcome any continuing conversation with the legislature and NJ DOE that will lead to measures that support increasing teacher diversity in New Jersey.

Thank you.

