

Dear Chair and members of the Committee:

My name is N’Jai-An Patters, and I am a teacher with a tier 2 license. I moved to the Twin Cities to pursue a doctoral degree in history at the University of Minnesota. Once I got my Ph.D., I decided to pursue a teaching career in K-12 schools because I wanted the primary focus of my professional life to be teaching rather than research. I used the pedagogical training that I received as a graduate instructor as a foundation for building my skills as a classroom teacher.

Through a combination of mentoring, professional development, and coaching, I have been a successful teacher for 8 years. My students, the majority of whom have been students of color, English language learners, and eligible for free and reduced lunch, have performed well. Both they and their families have responded positively to me, and my performance observations have been consistently excellent.

The current tiered system finally provides me with a path towards licensure in the field in which I actually teach. It gives me a chance at professional security within a public school setting. I have three post-secondary degrees in different social studies disciplines. I am a person of color, and I am committed to public education. I have taught at the university level and have spent years adapting this experience to provide rigorous, college preparatory instruction to middle and high school students.

The proposal under consideration today would require me to (re)enroll in a traditional teacher preparation program in order to keep teaching. Ironically, because of my background and experience, I have been on degree-granting committees in the very programs that this bill would require me to enroll in. These changes would push me out of public schools. Instead, I would teach in elite, private, college preparatory schools, where my background and experience are highly valued. This proposal would turn away qualified, sought-after teachers, and it is my fear that once the profession loses these individuals, they may be gone from teaching for good.

I have spoken to you today as a teacher, but I’d like to close as a parent with a child in a Minneapolis public school. I am more interested in knowing if my daughter’s teacher can implement best practices than I am in knowing if she learned those practices in a classroom, at a workshop, through a mentor, or with a coach. If we are truly committed to closing the achievement gap, diversifying the pool of classroom teachers is an important part of the solution. One way to think about this diversity is to create a space for a diversity of experiences and to create diverse paths for obtaining a license.

Thank you.

N’Jai-An Patters