



Good evening distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ryan Donlon and I am the Associate Executive Director of LEARN, one of six Regional Education Service Centers in Connecticut and a proud partner of the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program. I am here tonight in consideration of **HB 6439**.

I am also here tonight as a former magnet school teacher and administrator as well as a parent of two elementary-aged magnet school students. When deciding where I wanted to teach and the type of educational experience I valued for my own children, I knew that diversity was a top priority. A diverse school experience is central to the goal of teaching our children to learn with and from one another.

While a diverse student body is critically important, so too is the diversity of the teaching staff. The research is clear that teachers of color have positive impacts on all students – by improving achievement, increasing college admissions rates, and reducing the number of high school drop outs.

The districts LEARN serves in southeastern Connecticut are comprised of many diverse communities; however, the educators within our schools are predominately white, reflecting both state and national data as it relates to the lack of educators of color within schools. In fact, of the over 44,000 students in southeastern Connecticut, approximately 33% are students of color while only 4% of its 4600 educators are teachers for color. Unfortunately, the disparity of these statistics is not new – in fact, we've known for quite some time both the importance and the challenges of diversifying our teaching force.

What is new and promising is the impact of the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program – or CT TRP. Through this program and its partnerships, districts are not left competing against each other to recruit and hire teachers of color. Instead, they are working together to attract, develop, support, and retain exemplary diverse teaching candidates who often have existing ties to the local community and to its children.

In its first two years, CT TRP will have led to the certification of 25 teachers of color who are prepared and committed to serve the children and families in their local communities. Now set to expand to districts throughout the state, CT TRP will be able to expand to 60 resident positions for next year, greatly expanding the impact of its work and mission.

In this program residents:

- spend a full year working in the classroom of a mentor teacher
- receive full-time pay and full benefits for their work
- participate in 18 months of elementary education coursework at no cost
- are guaranteed a full-time job teaching in a partner district upon completion of certification

This model is unique in that it actively removes barriers by eliminating costly tuition and providing full-time pay and benefits to residents working in classrooms. It provides real world job-embedded training and ongoing supports that produce high quality diverse educators who are deeply committed to their schools and

community. It supports beginning educators and enriches the professional communities of each participating district. Ultimately, it also stimulates the economy by investing in underemployed individuals who expand their earning potential within one year.

School district leaders throughout the LEARN region are committed to the importance of this work and are eager to participate. However, the program does carry financial commitments that are extremely challenging for our local partners. The CAPSS blueprint indicates the amount to fully fund CT TRP is \$8 million for 8 sites across the state. At a minimum, we are asking for 80% of the funding needed in order to open four sites this summer. This percentage amounts to a \$3.6 million investment that would result in 60 new teachers of color. On behalf of the school districts, students, and families that I serve, I ask you to make this investment in our children and our schools to diversify Connecticut's teacher workforce.