

Testimony of

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Before the Education Committee

Re: SB 390 AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention

March 9, 2020

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Faith Sweeney, and I am a K-5 Literacy Coach in Westport CT. I am here to speak about Raised Senate Bill 390, An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

As a graduate of Connecticut public schools, it is vital that I share my truth with you. Throughout my educational experience in Connecticut, I have been a victim of microaggressions, racial slurs, and academic prejudice. I was either the only student of color, or one of two students of color in my classes. I share this to stress how important it is to have a diverse teaching population.

Over the past 24 years, I've taught in Stamford, Greenwich and Westport. Communities where most of the student and teaching population was white. Throughout my teaching career, I have witnessed the same microaggressions, racial slurs and academic prejudice towards students of color. By high school, students of color often feel invisible.

As a teacher of color, I recognize that my presence, voice, and actions give students as well as teachers the opportunity to base their judgements on personal experiences and connections—not generalizations and misconceptions that are a product of unconscious bias. Through those personal experiences each black, brown, tan, and white student and teacher becomes an ally for each other.

How do we expect our future leaders of the world to navigate the global community with compassion if their experiences are not representative of what they will face in their adult lives?

We need to name, narrate and eradicate racism. Students and teachers must develop compassion, effectively problem solve and advocate for each other as global citizens. As current leaders of the world we need to create environments where students and teachers do not have to navigate this alone.

In the picture book, *Desmond and the Meanest Word*, Desmond Tutu says, "Forgiveness will set you free." I also believe that addressing the issue can lead to understanding and, most importantly, change. Change that values diverse perspectives.

Funding towards the fidelity of recruiting, retaining and supporting teachers of color will have a positive impact on the overall wellbeing of our students and teachers. Help us all to succeed as global citizens.

I was heartened to recently read in the Hartford Courant that Senator Douglas McCrory has said, “The research shows that all our children ... learn better when there’s a diverse teaching population. One of the things we plan to do this legislative session is put some finances behind how we go out, recruit and retain minority teachers” (Feb. 10, 2020).

Thank you for your commitment to diversifying the teaching profession.