

Madam Chair and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Cynthia Navarro and I am a proud educator of color. I have been teaching middle school band in the Portland metro area for the past 5 years.

As it is currently written, HB2001 is not the answer to keeping educators of color in our schools. While the bill has the best intentions, it goes about it the wrong way. We need to focus on supporting our educators of color before we decide to leave and we need to create more opportunities for BIPOC students to become educators.

Towards the end of my first year teaching, I was approached by a teacher in my building about joining the building Equity Team. He gave me all of the information to sign up for the required courses to earn an equity certificate through a local organization hosted by a local college. At first, I felt like a token. Am I only being asked to do this because I'm Latina? At the time, I was the only teacher of color in my building. The only other licensed educator of color was our counselor.

Fast forward to a couple months later when I learn how much this program costs. The program would take 2 years worth of my continuing education funds. That's about \$5,000. As a band director, I have music conferences that I have to attend in order for my students to be able to perform at the state level. Those conferences are funded through my continuing education funds. My building administrator and my school district were unwilling to accommodate my request for building funds to be able to cover the cost of these conferences, allowing me to participate in the equity certificate program. As a first year teacher, I could not afford either of these out of pocket. I ended up rescinding my application in favor of opportunities for my students. In a school where 38% of our population identifies as Hispanic, 7% identify with two or more races, 6% identify as Black, 4% identify as Asian, and 1% identify as Pacific Islander. In a school where our students could benefit from having a BIPOC educator on their equity team. In a school where I was one of two licensed educators of color, I was not qualified to be on our equity team.

I asked my building administrator every year if I could be a part of the Equity Team and every year he would say to me, "Do you have your Equity Certificate?" I was not allowed on the equity team because I was unable to afford the music conference and the certificate. This year is the first year I have been able to participate on my building equity team. I ended up having to talk to the members of the team to be able to participate. My administrator still requires the certificate.

I was the only teacher of color in my building for the first 4 years of my career. This year finally brought another young, Latina educator. Together, along with our counselor we are trying to make our equity team be more focused on how we can dismantle these systems that perpetually underserve our students of color.

My administrator prevented me from being able to make a positive change in our building. I do not trust district officials or administrators to do what is right by my fellow BIPOC educators. If they can prevent us from using our perspectives for good, why would I want them deciding my merit?

For the first 4 years of my career I felt unsafe sharing my perspectives out of fear of retaliation. This is the first year I've felt like I have a say in the conversations surrounding students and educators of color. This level of trauma doesn't get fixed with the promise that we will *maybe* be seen as having more merit. We need support while we are in the classroom, not afterward when it comes time for layoffs. We need BIPOC mentors and affinity groups that are not held in a district office conference room facilitated by our white bosses. We as a state need to have systems in place to support our students of color who want to become educators. There is already an educator shortage -- there's an even bigger shortage of BIPOC choosing to be educators.

Another fear of mine is that this bill will put a target on the backs of educators of color. We are not strangers to wondering if we only got into our college of choice due to affirmative action. The amount of times I've had my classmates in college question my acceptance is astounding. I've heard, "Well, you only got in because you're Mexican" or "You didn't earn your scholarship money. You checked the Hispanic box" too many times to count. It is cruel to put us in the position of potentially having to relive our trauma when it comes to why we may have been spared while a colleague with more seniority gets the boot.

Currently, it is not feasible to request that the building demographics of teachers mirror the student population. I work in a school where nearly 60% of our students identify as non-white. We currently have TWO teachers of color on a staff of 28 teachers. In order to mirror our student population, we would need 14 more teachers of color. Where are we going to find these teachers? In order to fix these issues surrounding the retention of our BIPOC educators, we need more BIPOC educators. While I agree that our students of color need to see educators that look like them, our mostly white schools also need the perspectives of BIPOC educators. Students will never expand their worldview if they are only being surrounded and taught by people who have similar lived experiences. BIPOC teachers should be in every building regardless of the school demographics. Our voices and perspectives are valuable.

I hope that we can find a way to work together and present a bill that truly focuses on the root of why BIPOC educators are leaving the profession. We so desperately want to be a part of the conversation to make the path smoother for those that will come after us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Cynthia Navarro