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Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education

HB 5470: AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL INTERESTED IN PURSUING A COLLEGE DEGREE IN EDUCATION

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Good day, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on improving public education in the State of Connecticut.

My name is Yam Menon and I serve as the Director of Research and Policy at the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN. For over a decade, ConnCAN has fought and advocated for student-focused policies that ensure every child, regardless of the color of their skin or the neighborhood they live, can get the great education they need and deserve.

Research shows that a great teacher can undoubtedly change the life of a student. Knowing that an effective educator is the most important factor on student achievement that a school can control for, it is critical that Connecticut puts in place policies to help us attract, recruit and retain highly-qualified educators and school leaders, especially candidates of color.

With that, I submit testimony in strong support of *HB 5470: An Act Concerning A Pilot Program For Students In High School Interested In Pursuing A College Degree In Education*. This legislation permits minority high school students to enroll in teacher preparation program courses at partnering state universities for college credit. This legislation builds upon the progress made last session through the passage of Public Act 15-108, an important piece of legislation designed to help our state improve cultural competency training and facilitate efforts to attract and recruit highly-qualified minority teaching candidates.

Your efforts last session showed an unwavering commitment to bringing more diversity into our teaching core -- and this bill further extends that commitment. The establishment of a pilot program to encourage students of color to pursue a career in education does two things: It encourages diversity in the classroom and provides a pathway for students to see themselves as educators and leaders in Connecticut schools. By giving minority high school students a head start in taking teacher preparation courses for college credit, we can help grow and diversify our teacher candidate pipeline, and cultivate a qualified and diverse teaching talent pool starting in high school.

Research shows that students of color, when taught by educators of color, perform better on a number of academic indicators, including student performance, attendance,

expulsion and suspension. However, it is important to note that diversity simply does not benefit students of color, but has a positive impact on all students. A more diverse teacher and school leader workforce in Connecticut can widen the sense of community in our schools, providing all our children with examples of unique racial, ethnic and cultural perspectives. Simply put, greater diversity benefits all children.

More than 40% of students in Connecticut are students of color. Less than 10% of our teachers are of color. This bill will help us do more to encourage and support the recruitment of minority educators and improve education outcomes for all children, especially in our most vulnerable schools.

In fact, we know that educators of color are most likely to work in, and stay in, our most vulnerable schools. So any recruitment program, such as the one proposed this bill, could also bring some much-needed stability to the schools and students who need it most.

The benefits of increasing diversity at the school- and student-level are clear. Your efforts last session showed your commitment to the initiative, and this legislation moves us along even further.

We look forward to legislative proposals from the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force -- as we are hopeful they will go even further toward Connecticut having effective recruitment policies designed to encourage candidates of color to establish themselves in Connecticut classrooms.

I urge you to support *HB 5470: An Act Concerning A Pilot Program For Students In High School Interested In Pursuing A College Degree In Education*. We know that great teachers change lives, and programs like the one proposed here ensure we have a pipeline of effective, highly qualified and diverse candidates ready to lead our state's classrooms for decades to come.

Thank you.