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VIA REGULAR AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

March 30, 2017

Robert G. Hasson, Jr.
Acting Commissioner
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: ACLU of Maine Comments on Maine's State Education Plan Initial Draft

Dear Acting Commissioner Hasson,

We are writing in response to your invitation for public input to the recently released initial draft of Maine's State Education Plan. While we applaud the plan's emphasis on equity and access, especially its aim to develop Somali language transadaptations of math and science assessments and its promise to offer teacher preparation programs that focus on the unique needs of high-poverty and high-risk communities, we are concerned by the absence of any policy regarding the recruitment of diverse educators. While the plan clearly recognizes a pressing need to recruit, train, and support teachers to serve Maine's most vulnerable populations, the role of teacher diversity in ensuring equity in education has been completely overlooked.

As you note in your letter, the new requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act offer a valuable opportunity for Maine to reassess its strategies for "supporting equity for all students and accountability for all schools" and guaranteeing "protections for vulnerable students."¹ Increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce is a crucial component of achieving equity in education.² There remains a persistent achievement gap between white and nonwhite students,³ and greater diversity in Maine's educator workforce is an important step toward improving academic achievement and general

¹ Robert G. Hasson, Jr., untitled public letter regarding Maine's State Education Plan initial draft, March 1, 2017.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (Washington, D.C.: 2016).

³ Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, and Jacob L. Vigdor, "The Academic Achievement Gap in Grades 3 to 8," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 91, no. 2 (2009): 398-419; Erik A. Hanushek, "Is Location Fate? Distributional Aspects of Schooling," in *Education, Land, and Location*, eds. Gregory K. Ingram, Daphne A. Kenyon (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2014), 25-61.

wellbeing among Maine's students of color. Greater educator diversity would also contribute to cultivating respect and appreciation for difference among students in general and combating harmful negative racial stereotypes. As Education Secretary John B. King, Jr. explained in a 2016 speech:

*Without question, when the majority of students in public schools are students of color and only 18 percent of our teachers are teachers of color, we have an urgent need to act. We've got to understand that all students benefit from teacher diversity. We have strong evidence that students of color benefit from having teachers and leaders who look like them as role models and also benefit from the classroom dynamics that diversity creates. But it is also important for our white students to see teachers of color in leadership roles in their classrooms and communities. The question for the nation is how do we address this quickly and thoughtfully?*⁴

Maine's public school students are increasingly diverse. In 2013, nonwhite students comprised more than 9 percent of public school students in Maine, as compared to 2 percent in 1989.⁵ Portland Public Schools students are now over one third nonwhite, and racial diversity in Lewiston is almost as high. Several schools in those two cities are now over 50 percent nonwhite.⁶ However, as of 2012, less than 3 percent of Maine's teachers were nonwhite.⁷ Even in communities where students of color make up a significant portion of the student population, students can go from kindergarten through twelfth grade without ever having a nonwhite teacher.

Research over the past 40 years has consistently shown that racial diversity among teachers is correlated with greater student success according to several different indicators. These results are especially powerful for minority students, who constitute a growing proportion of public school students in Maine.

1. Teachers of color improve the social-psychological experience of school for students of color. Students of color who are taught by teachers of color are more confident, engaged, and motivated at school. One study of more than 80,000 students across six different states found that black students who had black teachers reported significantly better scores on personal effort, happiness in class, feeling cared for, student-teacher communication, post-secondary motivation, and academic engagement.⁸ Research has

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_203.70.asp

⁶ Civil Rights Data Collection, <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch#schoolSearch>.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013314_t1s_001.asp.

⁸ Anna Egalite and Brian Kisida, "The Effects of Teacher Match on Academic Perceptions and Attitudes," Working Paper, <https://ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Egalite-and-Kisida-RMET-Working-Paper-Feb-2017.pdf>.

also shown that minority students are better behaved,⁹ have lower dropout rates,¹⁰ and are absent from school less often when they are taught by minority teachers.¹¹

2. Teachers of color serve as valuable role models for students of color. Studies have shown that students are more motivated and have higher aspirations when they see demographically similar people to themselves in positions of authority in their schools.¹² Through the model of their teachers' professional success, they come to see their own educational possibilities more positively. Exposure to teachers of color is especially important because most students of color live in poor communities, and thus have limited opportunities to see people demographically similar to themselves in positions of power.¹³ Teachers of color also often take an active role in mentoring these underserved students.¹⁴ Their insights into the barriers faced by minority students earn them greater credibility with those students, which means they are in a uniquely strong position to help those students succeed.¹⁵

3. Racially diverse teachers benefit all students by helping prepare them to live in a diverse society. As a 2014 report by The Civil Rights Project notes, "children who are currently growing up in northern New England will need skills to navigate the rest of society, which is much more diverse, and should begin learning how to do so now."¹⁶ Maine's State Education Plan mandates that every student should become a responsible citizen who "understands and respects diversity."¹⁷ Increased exposure to educators of color will help Maine achieve this goal.

4. The presence of teachers of color in a school helps erode negative racial stereotypes.¹⁸ When students see nonwhite people in positions of authority, it challenges the harmful myths of racial inferiority that many students have

⁹ Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara F. Lucas, "Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: A Retrospective and Prospective Analysis," *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 103 (2004), 70–104; Kenneth J. Meier and Joseph Stewart, Jr., *The Politics of Hispanic Education: Un Paso Pa'lante y Dos Pa'tras* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1991).

¹⁰ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying"; Ronald Ehrenberg and Dominic J. Brewer, "Do School and Teacher Characteristics Matter? Evidence from High School and Beyond," *Economics and Education Review* 13, no. 1 (1993): 1-17.

¹¹ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying"; George Farkas, Robert P. Grobe, Daniel Sheehan, and Yuan Shuan, "Cultural Resources and School Success: Gender, Ethnicity, and Poverty Groups Within an Urban School District," *American Sociological Review* 55 (1990), 127-142.

¹² Egalite and Kisida, "Teacher Match."

¹³ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying"; Beverly Cole, "The Black Educator: An Endangered Species," *Journal of Negro Education* 55, no. 3 (1986), 326– 334.

¹⁴ Egalite and Kisida, "Teacher Match."

¹⁵ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying."

¹⁶ Jennifer B. Ayscue and Shoshee Jau, with Greg Flaxman, John Kucsera, and Genevieve Siegel, *Diversity in the Distance: The Onset of Racial Change in Northern New England Schools* (The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2014).

¹⁷ Maine Department of Education, *Maine's State Education Plan* initial draft (2017).

¹⁸ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying."

internalized.¹⁹ Researchers note that the absence of teachers of color in schools communicates to students that only white people are qualified for positions of authority.²⁰

5. Teachers of color often act as advocates for students of color who may feel alienated at school. Studies have shown that teachers of color are more likely to stand up against racism.²¹ In Maine, immigrant teachers have been important cultural brokers and translators, and have been an invaluable resource for immigrant parents navigating the American education system.²² They have also been leaders in building bridges between new Mainers and long-established communities.²³

6. Teachers of color improve academic outcomes for students of color.²⁴ One study found that when black students were randomly assigned to black teachers their math and reading test scores improved by three to four percent in the first year and two to four percent every subsequent year.²⁵ Another study found that the positive academic effects of matching demographically similar students and teachers were especially strong for black students in elementary grades.²⁶

7. Minority students whose histories, experiences, and cultures are often marginalized within a majority white school system benefit from teachers who share their cultural backgrounds and who are thus more attuned to the instructional techniques that work best for them.²⁷ Research has shown that students learn by connecting new material in

¹⁹ Margaret M. Waters, "An Agenda for Educating Black Teachers," *The Educational Forum* 53, no. 3 (1989), 267-279.

²⁰ W. A. Mercer and M. M. Mercer, "Standardized Testing: Its Impact on Blacks in Florida's Educational System," *Urban Educator* 8, no.1 (1986), 105-113.

²¹ U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*; Ana Maria Villegas and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, "Diversifying the Teaching Force: An Examination of Major Arguments," *The Urban Review* 42 (2010), 175-192.

²² Flynn Ross, Audra Watson, and Robert W. Simmons III, "Changing the Field: Graduates of Cohort Programs Move into Leadership Positions," in *Addressing the Demographic Imperative: Recruiting, Preparing, and Retaining a Diverse and Highly Effective Teaching Force*, ed. Christine Sleeter, La Vonne Neal and Kevin Kumashiro (New York: Routledge 2014).

²³ Ross et al. "Cohort Programs."

²⁴ Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying"; David W. Pitts, "Representative Bureaucracy, Ethnicity, and Public Schools: Examining the Link Between Representation and Performance," *Administration and Society* 39, no. 4 (2007), 497-526; Dan Goldhaber and Michael Hansen, *Is It Just a Bad Class? Assessing the Stability of Measured Teacher Performance* (Center for Education Data and Research, 2010); Mark O. Evans, "An Estimate of Race and Gender Role-Model Effects in Teaching High School," *Journal of Economic Education* 23, no. 3 (1992), 209-217; Kenneth J. Meire, "Latinos and Representative Bureaucracy: Testing the Thompson and Henderson Hypotheses," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 3, no. 4 (1993), 393-414.

²⁵ Thomas S. Dee, *Teachers' Race and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010).

²⁶ Anna Egalite, Brian Kisida, and Marcus Winters, "Representation in the Classroom: The Effect of Own-Race Teachers on Student Achievement," *Economics of Education Review* 45 (2015), 44- 52.

²⁷ Egalite and Kisida, "Teacher Match"; Villegas and Lucas, "Diversifying."

school to prior knowledge and experience.²⁸ Effective teaching helps students build these connections, and teachers who are familiar with students' particular cultural backgrounds have the expertise to select instructional materials that will be of interest to students, draw on examples from students' daily lives to illustrate new concepts, and use evaluative strategies that allow students to demonstrate what they know in culturally familiar forms.²⁹

8. Teachers of color exhibit less implicit racial bias in classroom discipline. Nonwhite students are disproportionately disciplined in Maine schools, which can exacerbate disparities in academic achievement and contribute to the overrepresentation of people of color in the criminal justice system. Studies have also found that black male students have a greater sense that their black male teachers care about them, communicate with them, and have control over the classroom, which helps produce more trust and less disruption in class.³⁰ In Maine, Somali teachers have helped schools refine their disciplinary procedures through workshops explaining those aspects of Somali culture that may be mistaken for disruptive behaviors, and helping schools generate culturally-informed responses.³¹

9. As a recent U.S. Department of Education report explains, "Diversity is inherently valuable. We are stronger as a nation when people of varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives work and learn together; diversity and inclusion breed innovation."³² In fact, studies have shown that companies perform better when their leadership is more diverse, and diverse groups are better problem solvers than homogenous ones.³³ Greater diversity in our educator workforce will thus contribute to greater creativity and innovation in addressing the challenges facing our public education system, inside and outside of the classroom.

While most research to date has focused on the positive effects that teachers of color have for students of color, it is also important that people of color be represented at all levels of

²⁸ Roland G. Tharp and Ronald Gallimore, *Rousing Minds to Life: Teaching, Learning, and Schooling in Social Contexts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kenneth Tobin, "Sociocultural Perspective on the Teaching and Learning of Science," in *Constructivism and Education*, eds. Marie Laroche, Nadine Bednarz, and Jim Garrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 195-212.

²⁹ Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, "An Analysis of the Problem of the Disappearing Black Educator," *Elementary School Journal* 88, no. 5 (1988), 503-514; Jacqueline Jordan Irvine and Beverly Jeanne Armento, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Lesson Planning for Elementary and Middle Grades* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001).

³⁰ Egalite and Kisida, "Teacher Match."

³¹ Flynn Ross and Abdullahi Ahmed, "Fostering Globalism: Community Partnership to Grow Your Own Teachers," in *Diversifying the Teaching Force in Transnational Contexts: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Clea Schmidt and Jens Schneider (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016).

³² U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*.

³³ U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*; Thomas Barta, Markus Kleiner, and Tilo Neumann, "Is There Payoff from Top-Team Diversity?," *McKinsey Quarterly* (April 2012); Lu Hong and Scott E. Page, "Groups of Diverse Problem Solvers Can Outperform Groups of High-Ability Problem Solvers," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 101, no. 46 (2004), 16385.

school leadership, both for the unique experience and insights they can bring to increasingly diverse student bodies and as role models within the school community.

Despite the proven benefits of teacher diversity for student success, lack of teacher diversity is a problem that affects every state in the U.S.³⁴ However, several states have implemented successful programs to recruit, train, and retain more teachers of color. While a full consideration of these different programs is beyond our scope here, we would direct you to the TeachStrong Coalition's policy proposals for teacher recruitment and diversifying the teacher workforce,³⁵ the U.S. Department of Education report, "The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce,"³⁶ and Flynn Ross et al.'s reviews of "Grow Your Own" teacher training programs that have been successful in Maine as well as other states.³⁷ Maine will continue to become more diverse, and we have a valuable opportunity to initiate programs now to diversify our teaching workforce before these racial inequities become increasingly entrenched.³⁸ Many new Mainers were teachers in their home countries and they are an excellent resource our schools should embrace.³⁹

Finally, although greater racial diversity in our educator workforce is of particularly significant and urgent importance, we would urge you not to neglect other forms of diversity such as socioeconomic background, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, and multilingualism.⁴⁰ The benefits for students of having racially diverse teachers are further amplified when combined with diversity along these other axes. Different types of diversity among educators serve to further challenge negative stereotypes, offer a greater variety of role models, provide more insights into students' different backgrounds and personal experiences, and further promote a culture that celebrates difference.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the initial draft of Maine's State Education Plan. The ACLU of Maine would be pleased to work with you in your efforts to increase teacher diversity. Please don't hesitate to be in touch if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

/s/ Zachary L. Heiden
Zachary L. Heiden, Esq.
Legal Director

/s/ Emma LeBlanc
Emma LeBlanc
Researcher

³⁴ Ulrich Boser, *Teacher Diversity Matters: A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color* (Center for American Progress, November 2011).

³⁵ TeachStrong, *TeachStrong Policy Proposal: Principle 1: Identify and Recruit More Teacher Candidates*, <https://teachstrong.org/principle-1-2/>.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*.

³⁷ Ross and Ahmed, "Globalism."

³⁸ Ayscue et al. *Diversity*.

³⁹ Ross and Ahmed, "Globalism."

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Education, *Racial Diversity*.