

Barbara Maas Written Testimony for SF4107

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and Members. My name is Barbara Maas and I'm an elementary education teacher candidate at Metro State University. I identify as an indigenous woman and I can only recall having 1 teacher who reflected my background in my K-12 education; and that was not until I was in high school. I also recall being verbally assaulted by one of my elementary teachers because I would not agree that Christopher Columbus discovered America. I knew at that age that indigenous people, my people, had been here thousands of years before him. Yet, I was forced to sit through lesson after lesson labeling his arrival as a glorious discovery of land. In reality it was a discovery of People. A discovery of People that resulted in forced assimilation and genocide. There is nothing glorious about that discovery to Indigenous people. Needless to say I was not a fan of school as a child. I didn't feel like it was a place that I belonged or was respected as an Indigenous person.

I want to become a licensed teacher because I want to give all children a place where they feel safe and supported. A place where they are comfortable to challenge themselves to achieve their dreams. I want schools to be a safe haven for all children where they are motivated to pursue their dreams. I don't want any child to feel the way I felt; as an outcast in a place built with the purpose to enrich young minds. I want to help youth see they matter in society. They have a sense of purpose, they are our future.

When I am in classrooms working with children, I can tell the difference I'm making. Besides the countless pieces of art work I have received, signed with love and the numerous hugs from scholars; I have witnessed a child's eyes light up after grasping math concepts. I have seen attendance improve because a child feels their classroom is a unique family, providing a safe and supportive place for one another.

Offering scholarships to aspiring teachers of color and American Indian teachers is supporting us to inspire and open young minds. The scholarships provide an opportunity for People of color to enter into a system to bring our different and unique experiences and perspectives, providing a wider spectrum of relevance for our diverse students to relate to. We are role models to all students, and being in classrooms and schools demonstrate to our children the capability of diverse minds working together.

Please support the Aspiring Teachers of Color Scholarship Program because it removes the added burden and stress of paying for tuition and other expenses. While working towards my Associates Degree years ago, I worked 3 jobs to support myself and student loans for my tuition, which I am still working at paying off. At that time, I made the difficult decision to walk away from my dream of being an elementary teacher because of the financial burdens. The teacher scholarships for BIPOC I have received so far have helped make it possible for me to return to college to achieve my aspiration of being an educator. This program helps make the passion for guiding our youth, our future, a more achievable reality. It has definitely helped me to once again pursue my dream and to make it into a reality. Thank you.