

In support of S.F.2042

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate File 2042. I am writing on behalf of the African American Leadership Forum (AALF), a network of Black leaders and allies committed to improving the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the African American community in Minnesota.

The Forum strongly supports this bill directing the Commissioner of Children, Youth, and Families to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment of out-of-school and youth programming. For decades, we have witnessed significant disparities in access to quality youth programming for African American youth across the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota. These disparities have real consequences for educational outcomes, career readiness, and community well-being.

Black youth in our state face unique challenges, including systemic barriers to accessing enrichment opportunities that their peers in more affluent and predominantly white communities often take for granted. Without comprehensive data on where programs exist, who they serve, and how they are funded, we cannot effectively address these inequities. This assessment is a crucial first step toward ensuring all young people in Minnesota, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, have equitable access to developmental opportunities.

We particularly commend the bill's emphasis on community engagement throughout the evaluation process. For too long, decisions affecting Black youth have been made without meaningful input from Black families, community leaders, and youth themselves. By mandating engagement with young people, families, and community organizations, this bill creates space for Black voices to shape the findings and recommendations.

The Forum believes that culturally responsive and affirming programming is essential for the healthy development of Black youth. This assessment provides an opportunity to evaluate not just the availability of programs, but their cultural relevance and effectiveness in meeting the specific needs of diverse communities. The insights gained will be

invaluable in developing programming that honors and celebrates the cultural identities of all Minnesota youth.

The appropriation for this assessment represents a necessary investment in advancing racial equity for Minnesota's youth. Historical patterns of disinvestment in Black communities have created persistent gaps in opportunity. By identifying where resources are currently allocated and where they are most needed, this assessment can guide more equitable distribution of funding and support.

The Forum envisions a Minnesota where every young person has access to high-quality, culturally affirming out-of-school programs that nurture their talents, strengthen their sense of identity, and prepare them for future success. Senate File 2042 represents an important step toward realizing that vision.

We urge this committee to support Senate File 2042, not merely as a data collection exercise, but as a commitment to addressing the systemic inequities that have limited opportunities for Black youth in our state for far too long.

Thank you for your consideration.

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