

Testimony: Minnesota Challenge Grant Amendment

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Hello, my name is Khalique Rogers, Executive Director of Catalyst for Systems Change. I appreciate the opportunity to share why amending the Minnesota Challenge Program—administered by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency—to include contract alternative schools and tribal schools is crucial.

This amendment is a triple win for our state. It will enable youth to learn valuable construction trade skills while contributing to the development of affordable housing. At Catalyst for Systems Change, we focus on addressing the holistic needs of youth and families—housing, workforce, and education. By promoting cross-sector and intergenerational approaches, we uplift our communities economically, helping them transition from surviving to thriving.

When I originally came to the legislature to introduce this community-driven idea, I had not realized that this opportunity for students to build construction skills while building affordable housing through the Minnesota Challenge Program did not make schools such as GAP School and tribal schools eligible. That exclusion came as a surprise, especially given how impactful these institutions have already been in this work.

Adding contract alternative schools and tribal schools to this amendment is essential. Schools like GAP School have been successfully building homes for years, and it's crucial to ensure such institutions have access to the Challenge Program. This will expand opportunities for more students to gain skills that will serve them for a lifetime.

Thank you for considering this amendment. I yield my time.