



## Seattle Human Rights Commission

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April 10, 2015

State of Washington  
P.O. Box 40425  
Olympia, WA 98504

Re: Support of House Bill 1541 to Close the Educational Opportunity Gap in Washington State

Dear Senator Steve Litzow and Senator Bruce Dammeier,

The Seattle Human Rights Commission urges you to support House Bill 1541- Implementing Strategies to Close the Educational Opportunity Gap, based on the recommendations of the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee.

The children of Seattle and of Washington State have the fundamental human right to education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims in Article 26 that “everyone has the right to education.” The right to education has been widely recognized and developed by a number of international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These instruments recognize the universal right to education without discrimination of any kind and establish an understanding that education is a powerful tool in developing the human, social and economic potential of all people.

Given these international human rights-based precepts, the Commission strongly urges the State to reinforce culturally competent instructional and discipline strategies to ensure that all students are served holistically and no students are targeted or left out based on their country of origin and race. The right to education encompasses the goal enacted by the legislature of the State to provide a public school system that gives all students the opportunity to achieve personal and academic success and to fulfill the promise of excellence and opportunity for students of certain demographic groups, including English language learners. We urge the State of Washington to uphold human rights standards and protection for students in Washington and to adopt the six recommendations as outlined by the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee:

1. **Disproportionality in Student Discipline:** Under Human Rights Law, states must ensure that education at all levels exhibits the following four “interrelated and essential” features: 1. Availability, 2. Accessibility, 3. Acceptability and 4. Adaptability. When the school system uses severe school discipline policies that disproportionately impact

African American and Latino students, it becomes a violation of a student's human right to the accessibility of education. This leads to a number of additional negative consequences including low graduation rates among students of color, high unemployment rates, the alarming school-to-prison pipeline, and excessive incarceration costs for the state.

- 2. Educator Cultural Competence:** The UNESCO Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989) summarizes the need for education programs to adapt to the characteristics of the receiving population groups: "The Contracting States agree to provide and develop technical and vocational education programs that take account of...the educational, cultural and social background of the population concerned and its vocational aspirations." Enhancing the cultural competence of educators will protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions and fulfill the rights of students.
- 3. Instructing English Language Learners and English Language Learner Accountability:** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), summarizes that "the education of the child shall be directed to...the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate." The City of Seattle and Washington State are experiencing an increase in linguistically diverse students. In order to be equipped with the tools to teach in appropriate, culturally competent and relevant ways, educators must complete English Language Learner Acquisition endorsement.
- 5. Disaggregated Student Data:** Developing disaggregated data is essential in advancing human rights and in meeting the obligations of non-discrimination and equality, according to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission. The use of disaggregated statistics will account for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations of students, and will inform and guide educators and social service providers in how to deliver services to all student populations. We also urge that methods of inquiry and disaggregated data collection be safeguarded for the protection of people and only be committed to use to eliminate discrimination and reduce inequities.
- 6. Recruitment and Retention of Educators:** The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) frames the need that the State "should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole." Preserving the knowledge of history, language, culture and traditions starts with hiring and retaining educators that reflect the student population. Furthermore, it is crucial for the school system to provide innovative teacher-preparation approaches so that educators can be successful in explicitly supporting students of color.

The Seattle Human Rights Commission applauds the House of Representatives of the Washington State Legislature for supporting the legislation to implement recommendations from the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, but this work is not over. We urge the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee to fully fund HB 1541. Implementation of HB 1541 must be carried out immediately and authentically so that human rights are protected. It is an important step towards affirming human rights by creating an equitable education system for all, including the most marginalized students in Washington State.

Sincerely,



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Sarah Bishop, Co-Chair

*Amy Huang*

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Amy Huang



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Ethel Branch, Co-Chair