

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Joint Statement From Organizations Serving Communities of Color On The Lack of Diversity In The State Legislature, Particularly In The Education Committee

Boston, MA — As members and representatives of African-American, Latinx and Asian-American serving communities and organizations, we are disheartened by the abrupt removal of Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz from the Joint Committee on Education at a critical time when the State Legislature is preparing to debate school finance reform. The decision to remove Senator Chang-Diaz from this important Committee raises serious concerns about the State Legislature's commitment to our children, particularly English language learners, children from low-income families, and children of color. By removing the most visible and vocal supporter for communities of color from this Committee, we are left without an advocate who will champion the issues that impact our most vulnerable children during one of the most important education equity decisions of our time.

Political representation of African-American, Latinx and Asian-American residents is extremely low in Beacon Hill, even more so when it comes to women of color. In fact, the Massachusetts Legislature is one of the least diverse in the nation. Senator Chang-Diaz is the only woman of color in the Senate. Of the 160 Representatives in the State House, only five are women of color. It is important to understand that when we elect people of color to represent us, they bring unique cultural and community perspectives to Beacon Hill that should be respected and embraced rather than sidelined and undermined.

In light of the significant challenges facing the Commonwealth to close pervasive racial achievement gaps, we are deeply dismayed by the removal of Senator Chang-Diaz not only as Co-Chair of the Education Committee but from the Committee itself. Senator Chang-Diaz has been a highly visible and vocal leader on the issue of closing the Commonwealth's achievement gaps for students of color and ensuring equitable funding for our public schools. There is no stronger advocate for our children on Beacon Hill when it comes to educational access and opportunity. The two legislators who now chair the Education Committee represent predominantly white and affluent suburban districts, creating higher stakes for ensuring that the issues facing low-income children and children of color are kept front and center. We see and feel this loss because her advocacy has consistently been on behalf of our communities.

We are also deeply concerned with media reports that attempt to discredit Senator Chang-Diaz's significant accomplishments on education reform. She has been unfairly characterized as being too passionate, overly committed to equity issues, and lacking strategic heft. These character attacks — coupled with the disturbing notion that her advocacy for English language learners, low-income children, and children of color lacks pragmatism — have fomented a

deeply racist and sexist narrative. This is a troubling narrative that women of color in leadership positions and public office all too often have to fight against.

To be clear, our concerns are not solely about Senator Chang-Diaz. In this moment, she serves as the latest example of how people of color — especially women of color — are subject to rebuke for representing us too fiercely and too well. We were expecting bold change from the Legislature's leadership, but now we fear that this commitment has moved in the opposite direction, especially when it comes to closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for the children in the diverse and low-income communities that we serve and represent.

We demand that the State Legislature immediately bring greater racial diversity, including women of color, to its leadership and to the Education Committee so we can be assured that our voices are heard, our issues are addressed, and that our Legislature is working for all of us.

This joint statement was released by the following organizations and individuals:

Alex Oliver-Davila and Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Co-Chairs, Greater Boston Latino Network
Betty Francisco and Eneida Roman, Co-Founders, Amplify Latinx
Diana Hwang, Founder, Asian American Women's Political Initiative (AAWPI)
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