

**TESTIMONY OF AFRIKA LYONS, M.S. Ed, ACSP
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST**

MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE

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Good Afternoon Everyone:

My name is Afrika Lyons, I am a school psychologist, and I reside in the Hartford area. I want to thank this task force for putting together this meeting and providing the platform for me to speak this afternoon. I think the mission of this task force is great and well over due; you all should be commended for your efforts to make a meaningful change. However, I would like to suggest that the task force look upon all aspects of our educational system, and the barriers which not only affects teachers, but, barriers which are put in place for other educators such as school psychologists like myself.

Before I begin, I would like to provide you all with a brief background history about myself: I hold a master's degree in education, school psychology, and I have an additional advanced degree in school psychology. I graduated with high honors from my school psychology program and I am a member of Kappa Delta Pi, the International Honor Society in Education. Previously, I've worked as a research assistant on several community projects in the Brownsville, Flatbush, and Canarsie neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. In addition, I have letters of professional endorsement from esteemed university professors and doctors of education in New York as well as urban supervising school psychologists in Connecticut.

With that said, in order for me to be certified in the state of CT, I must pass the TEACHER Praxis I certification test. In my questioning about such requirements, I have been told by various persons that it's a simple "basic reading, writing, and math test" put in place to assess my reading, writing, and math skills. The mere fact that I hold a master's degree in my concentration is a clear indication that I can read and write because the majority of our domain is centered on conducting cognitive, academic, and social emotional assessments as well as writing thorough psycho-educational reports and clinical case conceptualizations. However, because I have not earned a set score on a math exam irrelevant to my field, I am told that I am not eligible to practice school psychology.

My thought process centered on this issue started from how such an unfair process can exist in our state, and then my thoughts gravitated to how sad that this process does exist in our state. Task members, please take a minute and process what I am saying: Connecticut continues to bar talented and accomplished school psychologist professionals from not practicing their trade and obtaining certification based upon a math test score. This math test focuses upon skills that most professional individuals in the field have been away from for 8-10 years, do not use in day-to-day practice, and has absolutely zero bearing on the field in which the individual school psychologist practices. When a graduate level school psychologist with a record of expertise in the specialized practice area can be deemed ineligible for certification based upon random math achievement based tasks, our State Board Of Education (SBOE) should begin to consider policy and practice improvements within our state. Furthermore, the fact that Connecticut elects not to assess in the specialty area of school psychology when providing SBOE certification endorsements only puts our state and school districts at risk of not

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certifying truly competent individuals, but only individuals who may be great at solving calculus, geometry, and algebraic equations.

Just so that you all are aware, CT is the only state, which requires school psychologists to pass this examination in order to be certified in the state. In fact, NY, NJ, MA, MN, VT, PA, and NH all provide a sensible pathway (which does not include any examinations) for school psychologist certification. Again, despite the fact that my academic credentials exceed CT's school psychologist requirements for certification, the SBOE only certifies school psychologists based on passing a teacher's certification exam.

What is further displeasing is that a young talented female as myself, who brought diversity to the profession of school psychology, had no recourse despite the fact that I am certified in another state. Within the Hartford school district, there are about 30 school psychologists, out of those 30; there are 2 African Americans and 4 Hispanic school psychologists. While working in the district, I was the youngest, out of all my colleagues. In a district where the population is majority Black and Hispanic, it's very important that the staff is reflective of the population. This is particularly important because Black and Hispanic youths are being placed into special education at disproportionate rates, and as a result, the achievement gap continues to grow which also contributes to the school to prison pipeline system.

When an unfair process is in place that continues to exclude the wrong people, policy and practice improvements are necessary. In this given situation, qualified educators are being excluded, and Connecticut is doing a disservice not only to the school psychology profession, but also a disservice to a population who matters the most: students across CT who desperately need our services.

Thank you for your time and all the best.

Regards,

Afrika Lyons

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