
People of Color and Indigenous Caucus (POCI)

Minnesota Senate

Senator Foung Hawj
POCI Caucus Co-Chair

95 University Ave. W., Suite 3413
St. Paul, MN 55155
Phone: 651-296-5285



Minnesota House of Representatives

Representative Rena Moran
POCI Caucus Co-Chair

575 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
Phone: 651-296-2491

February 1, 2019

Dear DFL Colleagues,

On February 28th, during our Joint Convention, we will select four new members to the University of Minnesota Board of Regents. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the board membership is significant. We'll have an opportunity to elect the most diverse Board in the history of the University and we recommend that our DFL joint Caucus unite around the opportunity to elect four people of color as University of MN Regents this term.

As elected officials representing Indigenous communities and communities of color, we are concerned that the University of Minnesota has made little or no progress towards meeting the goals of the resolution adopted in 2016 to improve the retention and recruitment of underrepresented students. The University has not met its goals of addressing persistent graduation gaps and improving its campus climate for students of color and Indigenous students. We believe that adding more diversity to the Board of Regents will be a critical step towards fulfilling these goals and addressing the persistent disparities affecting the University of Minnesota. We need a more robust effort recruiting, retaining, and graduating more professionals in every program at the U. We can't afford the current status quo.

The POCI Caucus, after carefully reviewing the applicant's resumes and their background, has decided to support the election of the following candidates for Regents:

Student Regent: Mike Kenyana

Fifth District Regent: Peggy Lucas

At Large Regents: Dr. Abdul Omari and Kao Ly Ilean Her.

After assessing the composition of the current Board, which was appointed during the last cycle, when NONE of the 12 finalists forwarded to the joint committee were people of color, we concluded that this year's pool of candidates offered a great opportunity to diversify the Board. Our dismal record of recruiting and appointing people of color and Indigenous people to the Board is alarming, and we want to change this record, starting this year. Adding four new diverse Regents to the Board will ensure that the Board is more reflective of the student population, at least for the next six years.

Our caucus members were particularly troubled by the selection process followed by the Regent Candidate Advisory Council this year, which excluded Dr. Abdul Omari from being considered for reappointment. We believe that Dr. Omari is an outstanding candidate, who has served the institution with distinction and who deserves to be re-appointed as Regent.

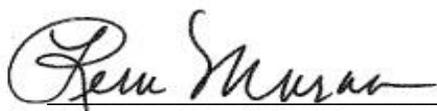
Dr. Omari was an undergraduate, Masters, and Doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. He championed work around equity, student of color enrollment, mental health, disaggregation of demographic data, and affirmative consent during his tenure as Student Regent. One of the most consequential and significant responsibilities he led during his tenure was the selection of the first female President of the University, Joan T.A. Gabel. Dr. Omari chaired the presidential search and masterfully executed the most open and inclusive process that led to a confirmation of the President with a unanimous vote. The selection committee led by Dr. Omari represented diverse political, geographical, and professional affiliations, and Dr. Omari led them to consensus.

Regent Omari is the Chair of the Mission Fulfillment committee, which is one of the largest committees of the Board. It handles the academic side of the University. We believe that his professional credentials, his knowledge of the institution, and his commitment to the University have prepared him well to serve for another term. We find it quite difficult to understand why Dr. Omari was not recommended for re-election.

In reviewing the history of the University, we learned that only six African Americans have served as Regents, and much fewer members representing other communities of color have been recruited and submitted for appointment to this Board. We can't continue to accept business as usual and accept the lack of inclusion and efforts to diversify this important institution. As of last year only 58 percent of students of color, on average, graduated in four years. Although enrollment has slightly increased for students of color over the past 10 years, the student experience in the Research University Survey results showed a "concerning difference" in student satisfaction between students of color and American Indian students and white students.

This is an opportunity for DFLers in the House and Senate to join with the POCI caucus in taking bold action to meet the challenges of our times and diversify the Board of Regents. The members of our Caucus firmly intend to stay unified and vote together for this slate of incredibly qualified candidates. We understand the ramifications, should the rest of the caucus choose not to follow our lead. We sincerely hope that our DFL colleagues will join us in making history this February by voting with us to elect these four outstanding candidates!

Sincerely,



Representative Rena Moran
Co-Chair POCI Caucus



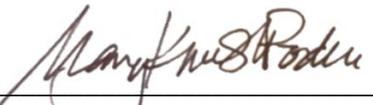
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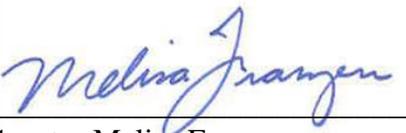
Senator Patricia Torres-Ray



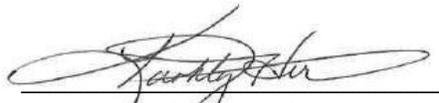
Representative Ruth Richardson



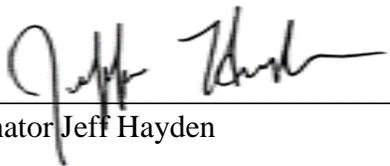
Representative Mary Kunesch-Podein



Senator Melisa Franzen



Representative Kaohly Her



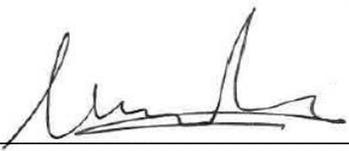
Senator Jeff Hayden



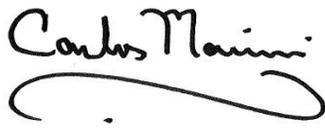
Representative Jamie Becker-Finn



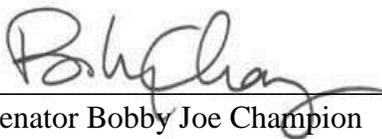
Representative Alice Mann



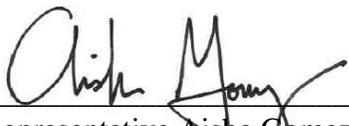
Representative Hodan Hassan



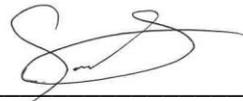
Representative Carlos Mariani



Senator Bobby Joe Champion



Representative Aisha Gomez



Representative Samantha Vang



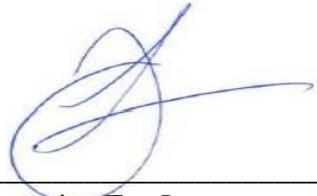
Representative Tou Xiong



Representative Jay Xiong



Representative Mohamud Noor



Representative Fue Lee