



Testimony in Support of Massachusetts S.324 – An Act Promoting Racially Integrated Schools

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Chair Lewis, Chair Gordon, vice chairs and members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Raul Fernandez, providing testimony in support of advancing S.324 – An Act Promoting Racially Integrated Schools.

I am a faculty member at Boston University, where I teach a graduate-level course on school segregation.

I also served as chair of the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council, a public body established by this Legislature to advise DESE on the state of racial imbalance in our schools.

It was in that capacity that I co-authored Racial Segregation in Massachusetts Schools, the first report in a generation to evidence the substantial and pervasive disparities between segregated white and nonwhite schools in the Commonwealth.

Our findings were stark:

- Over 225,000 students attend segregated schools producing substandard outcomes – 90% of them are Latino or Black.
- Across every measure – suspensions, absenteeism, graduation, MCAS scores – segregated nonwhite schools fare dramatically worse.
- The Accountability Percentile gap between intensely segregated white and nonwhite schools was an astonishing 48 points.

We released this report one year ago this month.

Since then, DESE has made no meaningful effort to respond – no further study, no funding, no plan.

Now, there is a tendency to think that race based gaps are unfortunate but to be expected.

After all, who is surprised to see worse outcomes for Latinos and Blacks in education, health, or economic data?

Even as our council did its work, we were saddened but not surprised to see these broad gaps in educational outcomes.

But such thinking skews policy making toward inadequate reforms that have failed to improve educational outcomes for generations of Latino and Black kids in urban and gateway districts.

We have to shift our mindset to one which sees racial disparities not as inevitable but rather unacceptable and avoidable.

Racial disparities in educational outcomes are not destiny. They are a policy failure.

Enter S.324 – An Act Promoting Racially Integrated Schools.

A modest proposal but one which is necessary to advance our understanding of the harms of our segregated schools and to lay the groundwork for robust solutions.

S.324 would require DESE to treat school segregation as the crisis it is – to gather and report data, to develop a statewide integration strategy, and to set meaningful goals for progress.

Without this kind of focused, state-level action, we will continue to fail our students – especially our Black and Latino students.

Segregation is no accident. It was created by policy – and it will take sustained, intentional policy to undo it.

Passing S.324 is a modest but necessary step in addressing these ongoing harms to our kids. I urge you to take it.

Thank you.