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Minnesota State Legislature House of Representatives
Senate Hearing on Proposed Bill SF2442:
Genocide Education about the Holocaust,
Indigenous Genocide and other Genocides
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

March 6, 2023

Respected Members of the Minnesota State Senate,

My name is Dr. Gabriela Spears-Rico. I am providing this testimony representing myself as an expert in Native American Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies and as a Board Member of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. I received my Ph.D. in Comparative Ethnic Studies and Native American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley in 2015. I am currently an award-winning Assistant Professor of Chicano Latino Studies and American Indian Studies at the U of M. As a trained interdisciplinary cultural anthropologist, I have published on the representation and politics of contemporary Indigenous communities in Mexico, whom I've been researching and collaborating with during the last fifteen years, in peer reviewed articles and with academic presses. I also currently teach both introductory survey courses and upper-division seminars in Indigenous Studies at the U of M. I am a member of and have held leadership positions in the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, among other international academic associations in Indigenous Studies.

Today, I testify to support this bill both as an Indigenous person, a member of the Pirinda community and a Purepecha descendant from the state of Michoacan in central Mexico, as the mother of a child who is a Dakota descendant and an Ojibwe tribal member, and as an academic with expertise on the topic. It is exciting to see that, as it is written, this mandate includes language on Indigenous genocide. As Indigenous people from this continent, we are often left out of history curriculum in our public schools; the genocide that occurred to our peoples is hardly or only referentially mentioned in history classes. It is important for our Indigenous children to see themselves in the curriculum and for all children to learn about how colonialism impacted the Indigenous people of the Americas. Such education helps counter stereotypes that plague Indigenous representation caused by the complete erasure of our history in schools. In Minnesota, it is particularly important for curriculum to include the Dakota genocide as well as Ojibwe and Ho-Chunk dispossession that took place, all of which involved mass deportations of American Indian people within and outside of the state. Events such as the imprisonment of Dakota people at Fort Snelling and their expulsion to Camp Davenport, Iowa should be acknowledged and taught so that going forward, we can move towards reconciliation and towards building a future that is inclusive of the interests and wellness of Indigenous people while working with our tribal nations. Thank you for your attention and time.