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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SOMA Board Member Madhu Pai thinks Black Male Teachers are Unicorns**

### **Social Media Exchange Reveals Bigoted Attitudes of South Orange-Maplewood District Leadership**

(Maplewood, NJ) – In a social media exchange with SOMA Black Parents Workshop leader Walter Fields on Facebook on May 17 2017, South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education member Madhu Pai defended the dearth of Black teachers in the district on a supposed shortage of teachers of color. She went on to suggest Black male teachers are so scarce their akin to “unicorns.”



**Madhu Pai** Also, to help lend some perspective on the teaching staff - our teaching staff is approximately 19% teachers of color (using the numbers in the Sage report, which admittedly are 1.5 years old). This is slightly higher than the national average of teachers of color. There are simply not enough teachers of color and finding teachers who are men of color is like looking for a unicorn. Not that we are not trying...

Today is the anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v Ferguson* that codified segregation in American society,” noted Walter Fields. “How shameful that in 2017 in South Orange and Maplewood New Jersey we have a member of the Board of Education who reflects the sentiments of

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Chief Justice Roger Taney in that dreadful Court ruling. Board member Pai plies excuses that echoes the White Citizens Councils of the 1950s. It's no wonder there is a dearth of Black teachers in the South Orange-Maplewood School District and most Black children receive an inferior education compared to their white peers."

Board Member Pai's comments come after the May 15 Board of Education meeting where the South Orange-Maplewood Community Coalition on Race issued the following comment on teacher diversity as part of a larger statement on the status of equity in the school district.

"Third, though the district continues to have as one of its goals to increase and maintain a diverse staff, and though the Coalition on Race has advocated this for many years, we have not seen much movement on increasing the number of teachers of color in our district, nor have enough robust efforts been made to retain the teachers of color we already have. We are aware that a Diversity Job Fair is scheduled for this spring but we are not satisfied that this is enough, especially given the district's history with recruiting teachers of color."

The Black Parents Workshop concurs. **Board Member Pai** served on the Board while the South Orange-Maplewood School District came under investigation for discriminating against Black students by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, and faced federal complaints by two of the nation's preeminent civil rights organizations. **Board Member Pai** has served on the Board while the racial achievement gap widened and while Black students have been denied access to courses they are legally entitled to enroll. **Board Member Pai** has served on the Board while Black students have been disproportionately disciplined and targeted. **Board Member Pai** has served as a Board member while the district has consistently failed to hire teachers of color; and specifically hire and retain Black teachers. **Board Member Pai** continues to serve on the Board and shows no leadership on any of these issues but has the audacity to suggest there aren't enough teachers of color to hire despite our communities' proximity to school districts with an abundance of Black teachers.

Walter Fields said, "What is more mythical than a Black male teacher is a Board of Education member with integrity. Madhu Pai represents the epitome of boutique bigotry; feigning concern for equity while supporting the maintenance of institutional racism. It is precisely her attitude that prevents the South Orange-Maplewood School District from breaking loose the chains of discrimination that have bound it

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for decades and denied thousands of Black students a quality education.”

The Black Parents Workshop recently arranged a visit for the district’s leadership to Morgan State University, one of the nation’s premier historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), to meet with the university’s School of Education and Urban Studies. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a collaboration to create a Black teacher pipeline to the South Orange-Maplewood School District. Morgan State, like its fellow HBCUs, produce Black elementary and secondary education teachers annually. The only shortage that exists is a **shortage of will** on the part of the district to go to the sources that have Black teacher candidates, and to create the conditions for their employment.

Fields added, “Madhu Pai represents the resistance to change, clothed in the aesthetic of “concern” but bathed in the bigotry of low expectations and racism that has defined the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education. It is why this district must face a day of reckoning over its racist behavior and individual Board members must be held accountable.”

For further information contact **Walter Fields** at 973 738-7876 or at the number listed above.

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