Good morning, Assemblywoman Brown and the Select Committee on the Status of Girls and Women of Color in California. It’s an honor and privilege to be here. My name is Adina Sterling and I’m an assistant professor of Organizational Behavior at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. My comments should not, in any way, be construed as the views of Stanford University. Rather, these comments reflect my personal views on the issue that we have been tasked with discussing today.

This morning I’ve decided to focus my comments on the trajectory of girls and women of color in higher education and their attainment of academic positions in business schools in California. The statistics on women of color graduating with PhDs in business around the state are dismal. Data from the UC system (www.universityofcalifornia.edu) indicates that 140 PhD degrees in business were granted from 2011 to 2015. Of those, none of these doctorate degrees went to African American women. For Chicana/Latina women, there were three PhDs granted, representing just over 2% of all PhD degrees earned in business.

It seems we have a “chicken and egg” problem. More specifically, studies show that students of color, as well as girls and women, do better in primary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms when teachers, professors and teaching assistants ‘look like them.’ For example, a study published by the AER Papers and Proceedings in 2005 by Thomas Dee using fixed-effect models for causal identification, shows that girls and minority students are more likely to be negatively perceived by a non-same-race teacher than a same-race teacher, which may affect their academic performance. More recently, a study published by the NBER in 2015 by Lusher, Campbell, and Carroll in the context of a large, diverse, and public university in California, shows that there is a positive and significant increase in course grades when university students are assigned TAs of the same race or ethnicity. In short, studies suggest that one way to encourage girls and women of color to pursue degrees in business is to increase the number of professors and TAs that look like them.

Obviously, the “chicken and egg” aspects of this are clear cut. Increasing faculty diversity is not possible until we have a pipeline of women of color pursuing undergraduate degrees that will prepare them for graduate school, in fields like economics, mathematics, and computer science. It

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is my opinion that this problem will likely remain unless explicit, concrete steps are taken to address it.

One step is educating young women of color that business is a viable career path. An important aspect of business disciplines is that they rely on logic and theoretical concepts borrowed from the social sciences – mainly economics, but also sociology, and psychology. Yet, women of color are much more likely to pursue degrees in social science than business. Data on the UC system indicates that 209 women of color (African American, Chicana/Latina, and Native American) graduated with an undergraduate degree in business in the 2014-2015 academic year, compared to 2,863 WOC that graduated in the social sciences, roughly a 1:14 ratio. For men (of all races), the ratio of business to social science degrees is almost 1:3, and for Asian men, this ratio is closer to 1:2. This means, if women of color pursuing a degree in the social sciences were to be made to realize that a “pivot” into business is more like a soft turn, this could have a substantial effect on the number of women of color entering business domains.

This might help with the supply of women of color with business degrees, but to make an impact on the diversity of faculty this will likely not be enough. For women of color to pursue a PhD in business, first need role models to plant the idea. Second, they need opportunities to do research. To get into a good graduate school today, you often need letters of reference from academics; these letters remain out-of-reach for many women of color.

I’ll close with anecdotes from my own experience. Arguably, I had a lot of advantages in applying to graduate school. My father is an academic, albeit not in a business discipline, so the idea of becoming an academic was planted in me at a young age. Even with this advantage, however, I still could have used additional help. I had excellent undergraduate grades, test scores, and prior research experience in an industry setting, but would have benefited from working directly with professors on research to hone my skills and to demonstrate my creativity prior to graduate school. That would have helped me get those ‘critical’ letters of recommendation for doctoral program entry.

I think a model like the Research Fellows Program (RFP) at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford provides a nice roadmap for this. RFP is a post-baccalaureate program for individuals needing additional research experience for PhD admittance. Because of its strong belief in the value of diversity, the program strongly encourages applications from women and underrepresented minorities. For a short time this summer, I worked with a woman of color that is currently a Research Fellow. She has a bright future ahead. This is a very replicable model. With the right resources and support, similar programs could be implemented in other universities around the state.

Thank you very much for your time.