

19th House District

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134th General Assembly Committees

Energy and Natural Resources
Health
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Primary & Secondary Education
Technology and Innovation, Ranking Member

Representative Mary Lightbody 19th House District

Testimony to the Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 554
April 5, 2022
Mary Lightbody, Ph.D.

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and fellow members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify in support of House Bill 554, which would establish a process for teachers with expired professional teacher's certificates and professional educator licenses to obtain a temporary educator license from the Ohio Board of Education.

This legislation will simplify the process for former licensed teachers, in good standing to return to the classroom after working in other professions. Currently Ohio Administrative Code 3301-24-08 allowed educators whose professional or associate license had lapsed for less than five years to reinstate that license upon completion of nine semester hours of coursework relevant to classroom teaching or in the area of licensure in which the license was to be renewed. Educators with licenses that had lapsed for five years or more could reinstate their license upon completion of 12 semester hours of such coursework.

HB 554 would allow returning teachers to renew their license with any applicable endorsements and enable them to return to the classroom sooner while concurrently completing either 18 continuing education units (180 contact hours) or 6 semester hours of coursework. This important legislation will help alleviate Ohio's teacher shortage and provide students with instruction from teachers with significant relevant workplace experience both inside and outside the classroom.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data has shown that nationally, there has been a net loss of around 600,000 educators working in public education since January 2020.¹ In Ohio, according to the Fordham Institute, there were 99,682 public school teachers working in 2020. This number is down from 112,834 in 2009 and does not yet account for the last two years.² We must provide additional opportunities for educators to join and re-enter the field in order to reverse this trend. The legislation that has been passed to temporality alter the requirements for substitute teachers has eased some of the pressure on classroom teachers, but there are people in Ohio who left teaching to pursue other career choices and may be willing to return to our K-12 classrooms if the pathway were easier.

¹ https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession?fbclid=IwAR1f5z5b5iJxZe93_KamA3miGepSE2gGDUUpqStFQbnvpqBjSNZ-0BxuaD4Y

² <https://www.ohiobythenumbers.com/>

Former teachers may now be accountants, lawyers, mechanics, small business owners, artists, medical professionals, scientists, police officers, translators, and/or veterans, and could provide significant contributions in the classroom. Yet in Ohio they must go back to school after a lifetime of relevant workplace experience to dust off their credentials before they can return to teaching. This policy deprives our students of the opportunity to learn from teachers who stepped away from teaching and gained valuable expertise from outside the classroom which they could productively share. These former educators are given no credit for their non-teaching experience and are essentially told to start over, despite having held a valid teacher's license.

A recent survey from the National Education Association found that over half of the members they surveyed are currently considering leaving teaching sooner than they had originally planned.³ It would be prudent to enact a policy which both makes it easier for these teachers to return to the classroom after time away and to provide opportunities to bring qualified teachers back into the field of education.

The Ohio Department of Education has also recognized this problem and recently revised its rule regarding professional educator license reinstatement. That plan permits the issuance of a one year, "reinstatement license" valid in the same grade levels and curriculum areas as an individual's expired license. This bill would codify a similar policy in state law. I have provided an additional handout that provides a brief overview of the teaching licenses Ohio offers now as background information for you.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I hope that you will support this legislation. Rep. Bird and I welcome your questions.

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³ https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession?fbclid=IwAR1f5z5b5iJxZe93_KamA3miGepSE2gGDUUpqStFQbnvpqBjSNZ-0BxuaD4Y