

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice-Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and Members of the Ohio House Education Committee,

As a supervisor for student teachers in south-eastern Ohio, I am writing to express support for H.B. 523, co-sponsored by Ranking Member Brennan and Representative Manning.

I strongly support the spirit of HB 523 and its goal of strengthening Ohio's educator pipeline by helping teacher candidates remain in Ohio and enter the teaching profession. Ensuring a steady pipeline of well-qualified educators is essential to the success of Ohio's children, schools, and communities.

I strongly support the bill's provisions that provide direct financial assistance to student teachers, including cost-of-living stipends during student teaching and reimbursement of licensure examination fees for candidates with demonstrated financial need.

Student teaching is a full-time, immersive clinical internship that significantly limits candidates' ability to maintain outside employment. Providing stipends and examination fee support will meaningfully reduce financial barriers and broaden access to the profession.

Several states, including Kentucky, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, have implemented student teaching stipend programs as part of broader strategies to strengthen recruitment and retention within their educator pipelines. Ohio's consideration of similar measures reflects a thoughtful and proactive approach.

I support the provision permitting school districts to compensate student teachers on an hourly basis and to offer benefits. However, in rural south-eastern Ohio, some districts may lack the financial capacity to do so without state funding. We encourage continued legislative consideration of future appropriations to ensure that all districts—particularly rural and high-need districts experiencing the most acute teacher shortages—are able to provide compensation and health benefits to student teachers. Without such support, disparities in local sources may limit the bill's intended impact. Compensation may also serve as an important incentive for candidates to complete their clinical experiences in communities facing the greatest workforce challenges.

Educators are called upon to meet a wide range of academic, social, and emotional needs for their students. Though supervised, during the student teaching experience, we ask our newest educators to assume the responsibilities of a full-time teaching role so they may develop these needed skills. However, due to the realities of housing and food expenses, the need to purchase appropriate professional attire, and the desire to invest in supplemental instructional materials to design high-quality lessons that effectively meet students' needs, many candidates must also maintain additional employment. Therefore, most candidates work — 10, 20, and some as many

as 30 hours per week in addition to fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. The additional costs of licensure exams, most of which are taken just before student teaching or during, can be a financial strain on students. Licensure exams range from \$109 to \$139 each. All candidates must take and pass a minimum of two exams, and many candidates must pass three or even four exams. Coupled with initial licensure fees, background checks, and fingerprinting, the end of the program is quite costly for student teachers, and it costs hundreds of dollars for them. It's not uncommon for our candidates to ask their families for funding for a licensure exam as a gift for their birthday or for Christmas.

Balancing these dual responsibilities of student teaching and work, coupled with additional fees to finish the program, often leads to increased stress, reduced sleep, and heightened challenges in an already demanding profession. There are only 24 hours in a day, and the cumulative strain is significant. If we are committed to supporting the health, well-being, and long-term success of our student teachers, we should support HB 523.

In closing, as a supervisor of student teachers I support HB 523's goal of reducing financial barriers and strengthening Ohio's teacher pipeline. I respectfully urge the General Assembly to take this important step forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Nicole Whitaker, PhD