

Education is my passion. I was born to a family of educators. Both of my parents were teachers, and now I myself am becoming one as well. My name is Olivia McClelland, and I am a board member for OEA's Aspiring Educators. I am studying to become a social studies teacher at the secondary level, and am currently student teaching before I graduate in May. I would like to begin my testimony with a sentiment about the necessity of education, which will be a common theme throughout this testimony, because I truly believe it to be a transformative power. **Public education matters.** Not only do schools act as a significant place for learning development and growth, but they are also a place where kids can get a meal, where they can learn to ask questions, or where they can receive a warm welcome from an adult who cares about them. It allows the most vulnerable and forgotten of us to have a chance. But, when we neglect the people who uphold this system, when we neglect educators and by proxy, neglect students. The result is disillusionment with education, and discouragement of educators as a consequence. **Less and less people are entering the field of education, and more and more people are leaving it. Teacher burnout has resulted in a severe and unprecedented teacher shortage. In the 2021-2022 academic year, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce found more than 43,000 individuals with active teaching credentials were not employed as teachers or staff members in an Ohio public school.** I can only imagine what this number has become, as the realities of those in this system continue to grow more difficult to navigate. **Yet as the problems continue to grow larger, the solutions implemented remain lacking.**

Being a part of the education system once you're in it is already difficult enough, but there are also too many barriers to entry for those who have the passion, skill, and dedication for it, despite the challenges. Student teaching is a full time job, yet many student teachers still need to work a compensated job in addition to their teaching just to make ends meet. We often worry about how we are going to pay our tuition, our rent, for our gas to get to school, for our groceries? I myself have had to choose more than once, between gas and dinner. However, still, I am one of the lucky ones. Many of my peers have had to make these sorts of decisions in addition to not having access to healthcare, or having to support other people as well. A good friend of mine who is in my teacher prep. program with me, has expressed to me many times "if I can just make it past graduation and get a job, I'll be okay" due to his lack of access to healthcare and need for medical services. On top of all of this, teacher candidates must take multiple licensure exams while student teaching which are at least \$110 each.

As I mentioned earlier, both my parents were teachers. But the reason I became a teacher wasn't because they encouraged it. In fact, their experience within the education system resulted in me being discouraged from entering it for most of my life. "Anything but teaching" was the sentiment I grew up around. Not because my parents despised their jobs. Teaching is their passion. But rather, because the lack of support they received as educators almost made the already difficult job too hard to bear. Having both taught in an inner city district that is grossly neglected for their entire careers. My whole life, they told me never to become a teacher because "it's not the same it used to be." They often would come home exhausted and defeated. But the

thing that kept them going back everyday wasn't the paycheck, because no one goes into teaching for the money, it was their passion. Their care for their students and their love for the art that is teaching. **My dad retired last May from a 38 year long career. He made it through. But unfortunately, in recent years he has become an exception in a system that continues to lose more and more teachers every year, because they are searching for a career where they will be more supported.**

That is why now more than ever, it is crucial to foster support for Aspiring Educators like myself. Our membership numbers for the Aspiring Educators division in OEA continues to grow rapidly with every academic year. We are working hard to recruit future educators, and give them the support they need in order to obtain their credentials and enter into an ever changing landscape that continues to pose new challenges. **We write these testimonies, and come here humbly, yet filled with unyielding passion and dedication to ask for your support on HouseBill 523 which is so crucial. When student teachers are not fairly compensated for their labor, the result is often burnout before they've even officially entered the profession. We can not afford to lose any more future educators. All our neighboring states have some form of compensated student teaching. By not allowing student teachers to be compensated, we are pushing them out of our state towards places where they will have more opportunity. Let's create the opportunity they are searching for here. The answer to Ohio's teacher shortage is more support for future educators, current educators, and public education.** Teaching is my purpose, and it is the purpose for so many others as well. But the profession which creates all other professions has too many barriers to entry. People with the passion and the purpose are too often steered away due to a lack of support and access to necessary resources. Let's work together to solve Ohio's teacher shortage. Our current and future educators depend on it, our students depend on it, our public education system depends on it. Ohio's future depends on it. Thank you.