

**Chair Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 523, also known as the *Future Educators Support Act*.

My name is Kyndal Mickel, and I serve as Chair of Aspiring Educators. Although I am not currently in my student teaching semester, I am deeply connected to those who are, and I took the time to be here today, to share our stories. In less than 72 hours, we received seven full written testimonies from aspiring educators specifically for this hearing. In October, we hosted a lobby day where AEs traveled from across the state to meet with legislators about this bill. Even today, several student teachers who wanted to be here could not attend because they were unable to miss time in their placements, especially after recent snow days disrupted so many classrooms. That is dedication. That is commitment to students.

I choose to be an aspiring educator because I believe in the power of education to shape confidence, identity, skills, and long-term opportunity. I know strong educators change the trajectory of children's lives.

Over the past year, I have read dozens of written testimonies and personal reflections from Aspiring Educators across our state. I have also had one-on-one conversations with current student teachers and classroom educators. The stories I've encountered are deeply personal, but they are not reflections of individual weakness or a lack of resilience. They reflect a systemic issue, one that the state of Ohio has the ability, and I believe the responsibility, to address, similar to our neighboring states.

I don't know much about sports, but I know enough to know that Ohio does not want to lose anything to Michigan- so imagine hearing true stories of Ohio's aspiring educators transferring schools to states, such as Michigan, due to them offering forms of compensation for their student teachers.

I have learned about student teachers experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness during their placements. I have been told about individuals on the verge of dropping out of their programs because unpaid student teaching made it financially impossible to continue. I have heard from aspiring educators who were working late-night shifts after full days in classrooms, running on exhaustion, burnout, and anxiety — not because they lacked determination, skills, or passion, but because they lacked pay. These stories range from current aspiring educators to seasoned career educators. These issues are not new, but they are increasing in number and intensity, as is the need for qualified, caring, educators.

Student teaching is full time professional labor. It includes lesson planning, grading, classroom management, family communication, and participation in school communities, to start. Yet

student teachers are expected to perform this work while often still paying tuition, prepping to pay for and take licensure exams, and finding outside employment just to survive.

Supporting student teachers with pay, healthcare access, and cost of living stipends would strengthen efforts to become an educator, because it would remove barriers for all. Especially those who are disproportionately impacted such as: first generation college students, students from low income backgrounds, and students of color. The same students who are fighting for visibility and advocacy in the classrooms currently. Especially amidst the "teacher shortage" we all keep hearing about. House bill 523 would allow aspiring educators to focus on becoming excellent teachers instead of worrying about eviction notices, grocery bills, or staying awake during the day because you had to work odd hours after a 7 hour work day in the classroom, on top of outside responsibilities.

Allowing state institutions of higher education to establish lower tuition rates and fees during student teaching would also help, because it acknowledges the reality that student teachers are contributing meaningful labor to school districts while simultaneously paying to be there. That financial strain is a contradiction that pushes too many talented future educators out of the pipeline.

This bill is a step toward aligning our policies with our values versus staying in the past because its the "way it was always done". If we want to address teacher shortages, diversify the profession, and strengthen our schools, we must evolve and invest in the people preparing to lead our classrooms.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 523, the *Future Educators Support Act*. I am available for any questions.