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

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of House Bill 523, the Future Educators Support Act.

I want to thank Representatives Brennan and Manning for introducing this vital piece of legislation. This bill addresses a long-standing, systemic flaw in our educational pipeline and takes a necessary step toward ensuring that aspiring educators are treated with dignity and fairness.

Traditionally, student teaching has been an unpaid requirement. Individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs are expected to work full-time in a classroom while simultaneously paying college tuition for the experience, as it is considered college coursework rather than employment. This model is inherently exploitative. It places an insurmountable financial barrier in front of working-class individuals, effectively reserving the teaching profession for those who have the generational wealth to survive a semester of uncompensated labor.

No one should have to sacrifice their basic needs—food, water, shelter, and healthcare—simply to complete their education and enter public service. House Bill 523 confronts this inequity directly by allowing public school districts to pay student teachers a wage no less than the state minimum wage and to offer them healthcare benefits on the same terms as regular teachers.

Furthermore, this legislation rightfully shifts the financial burden away from the individual student and onto the state and institutional levels. The authorization for state institutions of higher education to establish lower differential tuition rates, or waive general and instructional fees entirely during the student teaching period, makes higher education far more accessible. Paired with the requirement for the Department of Education and Workforce to provide a cost-of-living stipend and the State Board of Education to reimburse test fees, this bill creates a framework where future educators can survive their training without falling into poverty.

Finally, requiring the Department of Job and Family Services to explicitly add teachers to the list of in-demand jobs reflects the urgent reality of our workforce. We cannot demand a high-quality, robust public education system while simultaneously refusing to fund and support the people training to build it.

House Bill 523 is a pragmatic and highly necessary step toward making education accessible and ensuring fair compensation for essential labor. I urge this committee to prioritize the well-being of our future educators and the strength of our public school system by voting YES on House Bill 523.

Thank you for your time and consideration.