May 19, 2026
House Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 523
Melissa Cropper, President of Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 523. My name is Melissa Cropper, and I serve as the President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. OFT represents active and retired teachers in traditional and charter schools, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, library employees, and social workers.

OFT strongly supports the "Future Educators Support Act" because it recognizes an urgent reality facing Ohio's schools: school districts are struggling to recruit and retain qualified educators.

Teacher shortages are especially acute in rural communities, high-poverty districts, special education, career-technical education, math, science, and other high-need subject areas. At the same time, aspiring educators are being asked to complete increasingly rigorous preparation requirements while often working unpaid during student teaching placements and absorbing significant out-of-pocket costs for tuition, licensure exams, transportation, and living expenses.

If you ask any college student studying to become an educator, they will tell you that the traditional unpaid student teaching model is simply unsustainable. Too many future educators are forced to choose between completing their required field experience and paying rent, buying groceries, or maintaining health insurance coverage.

OFT supports the bill's provisions permitting school districts to compensate student teachers and offer healthcare benefits when feasible. Student teachers provide real value in classrooms while developing the skills necessary to become effective educators.

We also strongly support the bill's creation of cost-of-living stipends and licensure test fee reimbursements, and encourage the General Assembly to fund them. These supports acknowledge the economic realities many aspiring educators face and can make the difference between a student completing their preparation program or leaving the profession before they even begin. We also appreciate the bill's recognition of teaching as an in-demand profession in Ohio. At a time when schools across the state are struggling to fill vacancies, it is appropriate and necessary for Ohio's workforce policy to reflect the importance of supporting educators.

While HB 523 is an important step forward, we also encourage policymakers to continue addressing the broader issues contributing to Ohio's educator shortage. Competitive salaries, manageable workloads, safe working conditions, respect for the profession, and adequate school funding all remain essential to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators.

Ultimately, if Ohio is serious about addressing educator shortages, we must treat becoming a teacher as a supported career pathway rather than one that requires students to absorb significant financial hardship simply to enter into and stay in the profession.