**Ohio House Public Pensions and Insurance Committee**
Testimony of William Boone
President, Berea Federation of Teachers Local #1699
Opposition to Ohio House Bill 473
Wednesday, October 29th

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Teska, Ranking White, and members of the committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of my fellow Berea teachers and educators of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. My name is William Boone, and I serve as President of the Berea Federation of Teachers in Berea City Schools. I'm here to strongly oppose House Bill 473.

I want to start with a simple question that should guide every policy we pass in this building: How does this help address the teacher shortage crisis in Ohio? Because when I read House Bill 473, the answer is obvious; it doesn't. In fact, it worsens the problem.

**1. This Bill Eliminates Local Flexibility**
Pension pickups are not secret perks; they are negotiated tools that local school boards and unions use to attract and retain qualified educators. In Berea and across the state, we are struggling to fill classrooms. Districts are competing with neighboring communities, private schools, and the private sector for the same shrinking pool of candidates. Banning pension pickups takes away one of the few flexible tools local districts have to make their compensation packages competitive, especially when base wages can't keep pace with inflation or private-sector offers.

**2. This Bill Undermines Collective Bargaining**
Pension pickups exist because educators and employers bargain in good faith for what best fits their local context. Taking this off the table doesn't "restore fairness." It restricts democracy in the workplace. Teachers, police officers, firefighters, nurses, and other public employees should have the right to negotiate their compensation — whether through salary, benefits, or retirement contributions. HB 473 tells every public employee in Ohio, "You don't get to talk about that anymore." That's not transparency, that's silencing the working class.

**3. This Bill Hurts Recruitment and Retention**
Right now, Ohio has more than 15,000 unfilled education positions statewide. College enrollment in education programs has dropped nearly 40% over the past decade. Our retirees are leaving earlier, and our pipeline is shrinking. When we recruit a new teacher, especially in high-need areas like special education, math, or science, we often have to get creative. Sometimes that means offering a pension pickup or a partial pickup instead of a base salary increase. That flexibility can make the difference between filling a classroom or leaving it vacant for months.

**4. The Transparency Argument Is a Red Herring**
Every public employee contract, including pension contributions, is already public record because every contract is approved in open session by locally elected boards. Taxpayers can already see what their money funds. There's no secrecy here — just misunderstanding.

**5. The Real Cost**
Supporters claim HB 473 protects taxpayers. But in reality, it could cost taxpayers more. When pension pickups are banned, districts will have to raise base salaries to remain competitive. Those higher wages become the foundation for overtime, step increases, and future raises. Over time, that costs far more than a negotiated pickup ever did.

**6. A Bigger Pattern**
Educators have seen this pattern before. In 2011, Senate Bill 5 tried to strip away our bargaining rights entirely — and Ohio voters overwhelmingly rejected it. Now, year after year, smaller parts of that same agenda keep coming back — whether it's restricting faculty bargaining at universities, changing pension oversight, or banning negotiated benefits like this. HB 473 is another attempt to weaken public employee rights under the guise of "transparency."

So I'll return to my opening question: How does this help with the teacher shortage crisis? It doesn't help recruit a single new teacher. It doesn't retain a single experienced one. It doesn't improve classroom outcomes or save districts money. Instead, it takes away a local tool that helps schools compete for talent, undermines bargaining rights, and sends yet another message to educators that their work is undervalued. At a time when Ohio should be doing everything possible to make teaching more attractive, HB 473 does the opposite.

On behalf of the Berea Federation of Teachers and my fellow OFT educators across the state, I urge you to oppose House Bill 473. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.