

March 15, 2017

Chair Taylor and Members of the Committee,

My name is Malinda Hagerman-Merritt, and I reside at 2381 Teal Drive SE, Salem, OR. I am here before you representing Salem-Keizer educators and the opposition of SB 913 and SB 560.

I believe I was born with the calling to become an educator, I come from a family of teachers. My father was an industrial arts teacher for 32 years and my mother is now retired after her career teaching kindergarten.

This is my 25th year as a certified educator and I currently serve as the President of the Salem Keizer Education Association.

SB 913 and SB 560 are an unfair and extreme attack on teachers like me and the educators that I speak for. As a teacher, I have felt honored within my profession and within my community.

But in my 25 years teaching in Oregon, I do not feel that from our elected leaders.

When my father first began as an educator, a promise was made, to work for less than what he could earn in a different profession in exchange for a secure retirement that valued the contributions that he would make over his 32 years in the profession. This promise is not true for our early career educators and these two senate bills will completely eradicate this promise for all people entering the profession.

For as long as I can remember, the legislature has tried one attack on educators' retirement benefits after another, constantly telling the story that educators and other public servants are the cause of all of Oregon's budget woes. This is offensive to educators, the retirement system, is our delayed salaries that we, as professionals are due and would have earned in any other field.

What's worse, these attacks do not do much to solve the unfunded liability in PERS. The reality is that this will simply exacerbate existing problems to include the difficulty attracting and retaining qualified educators.

In my work as President, I have the honor of working with our Early Career Educators who are passionate about education and our profession. They enter their career with not only a 4-year degree but frequently a master's degree and are already burdened with extreme debt from student loans. In a world where we advocate for public education, we strive to hire the best and the brightest to teach our future leaders. The elimination of the IAP program for new hires, reducing their retirement by 31% will be the final straw that forces those considering the pursuit of a career in education to seek a different profession that is valued.

I urge you to reject these unfair and extreme attacks on educators' retirement benefits and fulfill the promise that was made in exchange for retirement benefits for educators, the people who serve Oregon's children.