

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Webber, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aurora Louise Benson, and I am writing in strong support of SB 717, which seeks to address financial barriers for aspiring educators and ensure mentor teachers receive fair compensation. As the friend and roommate of a student teacher at Oregon State University, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication, passion, and sacrifice required to enter this profession.

My loved one has devoted countless hours to reading educational literature, crafting lesson plans, mastering classroom management skills, and adapting to the diverse needs of her students, all without financial support. The reality is that student teaching is not only a significant commitment but also an overwhelming financial burden.

This burden extends beyond individuals, it affects the entire education system. Nearly 44% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years, a statistic that should raise alarm bells nationwide. One of the key contributors to this turnover is financial instability. The transition from full-time, unpaid student teaching to a first-year teaching salary, often insufficient to meet living expenses, forces many talented educators out of the profession before they've even had the chance to establish themselves. Currently, despite being an outstanding student, my partner must juggle three jobs outside the classroom just to afford living expenses here in Oregon.

Our country is already facing a severe teacher shortage, particularly in critical subjects like math, science, and special education. A major reason for this shortage is that fewer individuals are entering the field, discouraged by the financial strain of student teaching and the prospect of low pay after graduation. Providing compensation for student teachers is a necessary step toward reversing this trend. By easing financial pressures, we can ensure that more individuals are able to pursue their passion for education without the fear of financial hardship.

Additionally, fair compensation for student teachers would help retain talented educators. Teaching demands immense skill, dedication, and passion. If we fail to make the profession more accessible and financially sustainable from the outset, we risk losing bright, committed individuals who would have made exceptional teachers. Investing in future educators means investing in the success of our students and the strength of our education system.

Passing SB 717 is not just about fair pay; it is about ensuring that we continue to attract and retain the next generation of educators. It is about valuing their contributions and recognizing the profound impact they will have on our children's futures. By providing compensation for student teachers, we take a crucial step toward solving the teacher shortage, reducing turnover, and creating a more sustainable, supportive path for new educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Aurora Louise Benson, Concerned Citizen