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MAJORITY WHIP

Appropriations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Oral Testimony of Delegate Jazz Lewis
HB085 Education - Collective Bargaining - Certificated Employees - Class Size
Before the Ways and Means Committee

Chair Atterbeary and Vice-Chair Washington and members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in strong support of HB85, a reintroduction from last year to no longer prohibit the maximum number of students assigned to a class to be discussed during collective bargaining negotiations. Currently, statute restricts the subject from even being brought up. Despite the importance of the topic, and the importance that this would have on the work of our educators, they can't even have the conversation.

Through the pandemic, teachers have taken on a tremendous burden trying to continue to provide our children with a quality education. Often, with fewer resources and more students in their classrooms. Teachers report widespread burnout throughout our state and country while having greater difficulty providing that education they want students to receive. This has led to a rise in turnover and shortages of education professionals across our state and its school systems.

Every student added to a class adds a higher workload on that teacher. Which means less time available for that teacher to give the individualized attention to students they often need and more time managing what could be an unmanageable number of students. Providing just a little bit of agency for our educators on this matter can reduce burnout and mitigate the worst of the levels of turnover that we are seeing across our state.

The emphasis that the Blueprint for Maryland's Future places on hiring thousands of additional educators can have a transformative impact on student achievement, and will make strides to alleviate the burden borne by teachers in large classrooms. But giving educators the ability to discuss class sizes at the table and to have the conversations about the best path forward is a crucial step towards a long-term solution.

The fact that class sizes cannot even be brought up during collective bargaining limits our educator's ability to manage their classrooms and ultimately affects their ability to give our children the individualized attention they deserve. Escalating workloads and rising class sizes are becoming unmanageable for our educators and at a bare minimum, should be included as an option for negotiation.

This bill does not include any mandates or appropriations, according to its fiscal note it will likely have minimum fiscal impact on the state and local level. The bill does not itself reduce the sizes of our classes, but it simply allows for the conversation to take place. Because it is a conversation worth having and to prohibit it from even taking place silences our educators and has a negative impact on the education our children receive.

For these reasons I urge a favorable report.