

Testimony of Delegate Jazz Lewis
Education - Collective Bargaining - Certificated Employees - Class Size (HB890)
Before the Ways and Means Committee
On March 3, 2022 1:00pm

To Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

I am proud to introduce HB890, and I urge members of the committee to provide a favorable report on this bill. It's time that we ensure our state's educators are given a voice when it comes to the size of their classrooms. At a time of unprecedented fatigue among teachers, this legislation allows class size to simply be negotiated during collective bargaining; we are 1 of 9 states in the nation where it is illegal even to discuss the subject during negotiations.

The fact that class sizes cannot even be brought up during collective bargaining silences our teachers and limits their ability to manage their classrooms. This ultimately limits their ability to give our children the individualized attention they deserve. Escalating workloads and rising class sizes are becoming unmanageable for our teachers and holding our students back as they try to recover from the toll the COVID-19 Pandemic has taken on their education.

Right now, teachers are reporting widespread burnout because of the pandemic, their workload, and especially the class sizes they are forced to work with. We are facing a rise in turnover and staffing shortages because we are forcing teachers into impossible situations where they have no chance of doing their job well, depriving students of the education they need. A majority of Maryland educators report that class sizes are so large and staffing shortages so prevalent that they are more likely to retire early or leave their profession entirely than they were before the pandemic. But our law currently deprives them of the right to even negotiate for reasonable class sizes that maximize the education of our students.

Despite the record burnout and unprecedented working environment, teachers remain unable to simply have the conversation about their class sizes during collective bargaining. HB890 does nothing more than simply allow the size of classrooms to be a topic for discussion; it stops class sizes from being untouchable for our teachers when they are at the negotiating table. If teachers are able to have some small amount of control over the size of the classes they teach, we will retain our education professionals and ensure that more students are able to benefit from smaller classes where they can receive more individualized lessons and a better education.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give HB890 a favorable report.