

Submitter: Zena Stevens  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB717

717 Written Testimony  
Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Webber. and Members of the Committee,

My name is Zena Stevens (they/them), and I am a math teacher. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB717, which seeks to address financial barriers for aspiring educators and ensure mentor teachers receive fair compensation. In grad school, when I was interviewing and applying, I told that having a job during the program would make it almost impossible to keep up. Having experienced grad school, I would tend to agree with that statement.

For myself, grad school ending up being the worst year of my life. Having to move to a different city, during COVID, my support was minimal. I took out an extra \$15,000 in student loan debt to support living during my program. During this year I experienced suicidal ideation, and did not have the resources of money to support my mental health. It's a miracle I made it through grad school.

During my student teaching experience one of the fellow math teachers at Churchill HS left mid year and I was offered a job during the last trimester at Churchill HS. It was absolutely great to have money: being able to breathe a little, take some self care that is necessary with any stressful job, and start getting the mental health support I needed.

Even though it was very nice to have money, looking back I definitely missed a lot of learning, feedback, and supervision from my mentor teacher. While hands-on experience is the best way to learn, not having a mentor in the classroom as I taught resulted in me making the same mistakes multiple times. Hands-on experience is not much help if you don't learn from it. Not having my mentor in the room resulted in my graduating with classroom experience, but still underprepared for teaching.

My first year of teaching I almost burnt out and quit the profession. The things that kept me afloat was the fact I was part time - so I had a day to recover before I taught again, and my significant other.

As a 3rd year teacher the things that have helped me grow and stay in the profession are: an excellent school community at my new school A3 - with a stellar principal I trust and can admit mistakes to without feeling shame, amazing coworkers I collaborate with and learn from their experiences, and the respect and trust built between students and teachers through restorative conversations and a display of

care for themselves and their leaning.

While my story ended in success, I know of at least 1 teachers who quit in their second year (this year!) because of stress from being underprepared.

Please! Support SB717 so people can survive grad school without extra debt, lack of resources, and can graduate with the full experience of an educational program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Zena Stevens  
Springfield Education Association