



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

My name is Cynthia Branger Muñoz, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Oregon Education Association (OEA), which represents over 41,000 educators across the state, including teachers, education support professionals, community college faculty and staff, and aspiring educators. OEA strongly supports SB 717 as a necessary step to remove financial barriers for aspiring educators and ensure mentor teachers receive fair compensation for their essential role in teacher preparation.

This bill is rooted in the experiences of aspiring educators, who are OEA members and future teachers of Oregon. Many face significant financial hardship during their unpaid student teaching, often having to work part-time jobs to cover basic living expenses. In some cases, education programs prohibit student teachers from working, making it even more difficult for those without financial resources to complete their training. These barriers discourage talented individuals from entering the teaching profession and disproportionately impact candidates from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

SB 717 creates a necessary path toward ensuring that teacher candidates receive the financial support they need to fully engage in their training. It also recognizes the essential role of mentor teachers, who provide invaluable guidance to aspiring educators. Yet, many mentor teachers receive little or no compensation for their work, and in some districts, stipends meant for mentors are withheld or only partially disbursed. This disincentivizes participation and weakens the overall quality of teacher preparation programs.

Research shows that states with strong teacher residency models, where candidates are financially supported during their training, have higher retention rates among early-career educators and more effective preparation programs. Providing paid student teaching will help Oregon recruit and retain educators, particularly in high-need subject areas and underserved communities. Without this investment, our state risks continuing a cycle where new teachers enter the profession financially strained or unprepared, leading to high turnover rates that cost school districts an estimated \$20,000 per teacher vacancy.

There is an upcoming technical amendment to open the pilot program to Pacific University while leaving room for additional public universities to participate. We appreciate this adjustment to ensure broader access and engagement in this critical initiative.

OEA urges the committee's support for SB 717 and its forthcoming amendment. Investing in paid student teaching and fair mentor teacher compensation is an investment in Oregon's future educators and, ultimately, in the success of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.