

SB717 Written Testimony

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

My name is Maddy Wilson, and I am an aspiring educator and the President of the Oregon Education Association Aspiring Educator Council. I am currently in my third year at Western Oregon University, studying Elementary Education with a minor in ESOL. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of **SB717**, which aims to address financial barriers for aspiring educators and ensure mentor teachers receive fair compensation.

As an aspiring educator, the knowledge that I will not be paid during my student teaching year has made it incredibly challenging for me to continue my education and pursue a teaching career. A full year without income is not just an inconvenience—it is a significant financial hardship. Like many of my peers, I am balancing many expenses, yet I should be dedicating all my attention to my student teaching and classes rather than dividing my focus between my studies and a job. Student teaching is already a full-time commitment, and without financial support, many of us struggle to make ends meet.

I know many other aspiring educators facing similar expenses, such as housing, tuition, and other bills. I have encountered individuals who work with children but are not teachers—many originally intended to become educators but couldn't do so due to financial obligations such as caring for their children, paying rent, and covering other daily costs. These financial pressures create barriers for future teachers. This is not just a personal issue—it is a systemic barrier that is preventing passionate, qualified individuals from entering the field.

When student teachers are in the classroom, we play a critical role. We are not just observing—we are actively supporting classrooms, assisting our mentor teachers, working with students in small groups, and leading instruction. Many schools rely on student teachers to provide additional support, particularly in understaffed or high-need areas. We are an essential part of the learning environment, yet we do this work without compensation. Paying student teachers is not just about fairness; it is about recognizing the real contributions we make to schools and ensuring we can continue to do this important work.

We are in urgent need of educators; in 2023, there were over 55,000 teacher vacancies from kindergarten through high school nationwide. Oregon's schools are struggling to fill teaching positions, and the lack of financial support for student teachers only worsens this crisis. Providing paid student teaching opportunities will encourage more individuals to enter the profession and help sustain Oregon's educator pipeline.

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I urge the committee to support SB717. Investing in aspiring educators is an investment in Oregon's future. By ensuring that student teachers receive financial support, we will not only remove unnecessary barriers but also strengthen Oregon's schools and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maddy Wilson

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WOU Aspiring Educator