

Submitter: Elizabeth Heimer
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB717

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Webber, and Members of the Committee,
My name is Elizabeth Heimer, and I am a third-year student at Oregon State University pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. I write today to strongly support SB717, a bill that addresses the financial barriers facing aspiring educators and ensures fair compensation for mentor teachers who play a crucial role in shaping future educators.

Growing up, I often struggled to identify my passion. It's a question we're all asked, whether in career choices, college applications, or conversations with loved ones. For years, I didn't know how to answer. However, everything changed during the summer of 2023 when I worked as a Park District Intern. In that role, I worked with kids in before- and after-school care and organized community events. It was here that I discovered my true passion, working with children, teaching, and helping them succeed. I found my calling, and now, all I can imagine is becoming a teacher.

Unfortunately, teaching is often undervalued and poorly compensated, which is a reality many aspiring educators, like myself, face. While I've volunteered hours at an elementary school, gaining joy from connecting with students, that joy doesn't pay for tuition, groceries, or rent. Teaching is driven by passion, but it also requires experience, which is impossible to gain without the right support.

As I look ahead to my student teaching experience this fall, I feel anxiety about how I will manage financially. Student teaching requires full-time commitment with little room for part-time work, yet many aspiring teachers face the challenge of balancing full-time classroom responsibilities with no income. The financial strain is immense, and we are expected to focus on shaping students' futures while worrying about how to pay for basic living expenses.

The teaching profession is already facing a severe shortage of educators. Across Oregon and the nation, fewer qualified teachers are entering the classroom. Tragically, 44% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years due to burnout, poor pay, and overwhelming financial and emotional stress. If these issues are not addressed, we will continue losing talented individuals who could make a profound impact on our students.

SB717 is a crucial step forward. It addresses the financial barriers that aspiring educators face and ensures that mentor teachers are fairly compensated for their essential role in shaping the next generation of teachers. With this support, we will be

able to focus on our development as educators, gain the necessary experience, and, most importantly, remain in the field long enough to make the difference that so many of us strive for.

I am passionate about teaching, and there is no doubt in my mind that this is the path I want to follow. But I am also nervous, not about my ability to teach, but about how I will survive financially during the next few years of my education and early career. To retain passionate and dedicated individuals in the classroom, we must ensure they have the financial support and experience they need to succeed.

SB717 is an essential step toward a brighter future for education in Oregon. It is a commitment to the teachers who will one day shape our children's futures. I urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Heimer