



PHOENIX-TALENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

UNITY IS STRENGTH

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Latham and I am the President of the Phoenix-Talent Education Association, the educator union representing 142 licensed educators in the Phoenix-Talent School District. I am writing on behalf of my members and our community to express our support for this bill.

The Almeda wildfire that raged through our community in 2020 was devastating to our students and our educators, many lost their homes and the trauma of that day still affects us all. In the midst of the devastation, our educators banded together, making calls to families from our evacuated locations, venturing into the smoke and ash to collect donations in our school gyms, giving hugs to our displaced students as they mourned all they had lost. We came together in that crisis moment, and while the outpouring of support was truly staggering, as time passed our needs continued while our ability to meet them did not.

Five years later, we still see the panic in our students eyes when they see smoke from controlled burns on the hillsides, we still have students who mourn the loss of precious pets, and who struggle with mental health from experiencing such a traumatic event so early in their young lives.

We are so grateful for the funding that we have received to lighten the burden this tragedy has had on our district, and we understand that five years must feel like a long time to be relying on support from the legislature. The reality is that we have not had the opportunity to recover from the fire in the same way that we may have been able to if we were recovering without the complication that COVID and supply chain issues have had. Our students and educators are still recovering, and while we heal bit by bit, we are slowly seeing our community being rebuilt as well, but that recovery is painfully slow.

Phoenix-Talent is a diverse and close knit community that even when faced with great hardship and struggle, has banded together to support our own, but we do still need help. We are so close to being able to truly see families move back into our community and be able to call Phoenix-Talent home.

Our educators are ready to welcome new students into our classrooms and we hope you will support HB 3149 to help us to do what we do best, giving students a quality education taught by teachers who care deeply for our community and are supporting the needs of our students in continuing to recover from this tragedy.

Respectfully,
Laura Latham
Phoenix-Talent Education Association President
Talent Middle School Teacher

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much" - Helen Keller