

September 8, 2021

Senate Education Committee
Mississippi Senate
400 High St.
Jackson, MS 39201

ERICA JONES
President

DAREIN C. SPANN
Vice President

SUZANNE SMITH
Secretary-Treasurer

ANTONIO CASTANON LUNA
Executive Director

Dear Chairman DeBar and Education Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on teacher compensation as we all work together to ensure Mississippi's teachers can finally be paid a salary reflective of their value to the state.

We hope today's hearing is illustrative of a shift in thinking and representative of an understanding that education funding – and specifically teachers' salaries – is more than just appropriations, they're an investment in the future of our state. The only way Mississippi will see our economy grow, see fewer people in poverty, and see our state flourish is by investing in our public school educators and our public schools.

It's no secret that Mississippi educators are underpaid. It's also not a secret that we are in the midst of a certified teacher crisis. These facts are directly related. Teaching is a noble profession, and the way we have compensated Mississippi teachers up to this point does not reflect that.

Keeping Mississippi's best and brightest educators in our classrooms has become an uphill battle to say the least. We hear stories about teachers who are trained in our universities and who choose to make their lives here in Mississippi, but when they drive to their classroom it is often in a neighboring state where they tell us their careers are more fulfilling and more lucrative than if they'd chosen to teach down the street from their own homes.

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How are we to attract new educators and retain our veteran educators when the state has created an environment in which teachers rightfully feel underappreciated, inappropriately compensated, and unheard?

Recent pay raises have absolutely been a step in the right direction. That said, as we continue to grapple with the state's teacher shortage crisis and the knowledge that Mississippi teachers still struggle to make ends meet, it's important to remember that sporadic pay raises won't help us to recruit and retain teachers or allow teachers to quit their second and third jobs.

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We need to work together to develop a bold, long-term teacher pay plan that will help stop the hemorrhaging of teachers who can't afford to stay in the classroom and allow us to pay these hardworking professionals a salary reflective of their value.

A pay raise bill is never about lining our educators' pockets. None of us entered this profession to get rich. A meaningful teacher pay raise is about recruiting and retaining teachers, helping address the teacher shortage crisis, and making sure that every student in Mississippi has access to a highly qualified educator in their classroom.

Thank you for your dedication to our state's students and their educators. We look forward to working together on this and additional efforts to ensure every child in Mississippi has an opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,



Erica Jones

President

Mississippi Association of Educators

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