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Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning. It's Union Work!

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 860

Workers' Compensation – COVID–19 Occupational Disease Presumption 3 – Public School Employees

Senate Finance Committee

March 9, 2021

My name is Christopher Lloyd. I have the privilege of serving as the President of the Montgomery County Education Association and I am writing today in support of SB 860.

MCEA represents 14,000 educators teaching the more than 160,000 young scholars in Montgomery County Public Schools, the largest school district in the state. MCEA is the largest affiliate of the 75,000-member Maryland State Education Association and is affiliated with the 3-million-member National Education Association.

SB 860 would ensure that Maryland's educators, who are being forced back into buildings, would have access to workers compensation benefits.

This week, our educators began to reenter school buildings for the first time since March of last year. Over the last year, MCEA members have shown remarkable resiliency and demonstrated how truly adaptable they are willing to be. We have seen the struggles of our students in this virtual education space and are aware of how this trauma has transformed them. Educators want to be with their students; they are why we teach.

Our membership also wants to feel safe as they reenter school buildings. MCEA has serious concerns about air quality, access to vaccines, and areas where the school district is ignoring CDC guidelines, such as lack of cohorting on the secondary level. We are being asked to enter workplaces with conditions that contradict the health and safety recommendations outlined by health professionals over the last year.

It is my belief that passage of SB 860 could be a catalyst to school districts in Maryland to increase safety protocols within the school buildings. We are told by MCPS that we will be provided adequate personal protective equipment, that safety protocols will be adhered to, and that educators will not be put in unnecessary danger.

The MCEA educators who are in their first week of in-person teaching, as well as those who will begin in person teaching on March 15, have reported that they are being expected to go into as many as 20 classrooms in a week to provide coverage. The danger to both the educator and the students increases dramatically with this kind of movement. Air quality results are not being shared, and we have been met with resistance when attempting to follow the CDC school checklist. Passage of SB 860 could push districts to rethink such dangerous practices to avoid payment of workers compensation benefits.

The safety of not only the 14,000 MCEA members, but also the 160,000 students in Montgomery County public schools is why MCEA stands in strong support of SB 860.