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Testimony in Support of House Bill 85
Education - Collective Bargaining - Certificated Employees - Class Size

Ways and Means Committee
February 1, 2023
1:00pm

The Baltimore Teachers Union supports House Bill 85, which would remove class size from the list of topics that are prohibited from collective bargaining between school districts and employee organizations representing certificated staff.

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,595 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has over 1.7 million members in the United States and its territories.

House Bill 85 seeks to remove class size from the list of prohibited topics in collective bargaining between a public school employer and the organization representing its certificated staff. This bill would not require districts to negotiate on class size. Rather, it would allow teachers' unions to bring proposals on class size to the negotiations table. Under current law, school districts are required to negotiate on salaries, wages, hours, working conditions, and procedures for employee transfers and assignments. HB 85 does not add class size to the list of mandatory topics of bargaining. Class size would become a permissible topic of bargaining.

House Bill 85 rights an important wrong for teachers and other school staff that work with students. Class size is one of the most important factors that determine what a teacher is able to accomplish with their students. As teachers are increasingly facing burnout and considering leaving the profession, allowing unions to negotiate class size provides an important opportunity for teachers to improve their working conditions and ensure that students get more time, attention and instruction from their educators. Educators are held accountable through their evaluations for student outcomes, but they currently have no meaningful way to ensure that their classrooms have a manageable number of students.

With nationwide teacher shortages, Maryland school districts need creative staffing strategies to retain teachers and combat burnout. This enabling legislation allows educators to help shape the solutions to problems that impact every student in Maryland. This legislation would not put class size caps in place, nor would it require districts to enforce class size limits. It would simply allow teachers, who are deeply invested in the success of their classrooms, a platform to make proposals that could limit class sizes and determine additional compensation for teachers whose classes swell due to vacant positions. Across the country, agreements to address class size vary. Class sizes that exceed caps do not always mean building more schools or funding more positions. Large class

sizes in other states can trigger more student support staff within the classroom, or additional compensation for teachers of large classes. A variety of options can be brought to the table for school districts and unions to agree on - but only if unions are allowed to bring the issue to the bargaining table in the first place.

The challenges of Baltimore City Public Schools can only be overcome when they are addressed democratically, collectively and collaboratively. Our school district has not prioritized lowering class size, despite student, teacher, and family concerns. Class size has effects on student achievement, student participation, and the overall student experience in school. For this reason, we believe that additional measures are needed to resolve this urgent concern, and that class size should be a permissible topic of collective bargaining.

BTU urges a favorable report on House Bill 85.