



**Testimony by AFT Massachusetts President Beth Kontos
on Bills Relating to Educational Personnel
Joint Committee on Education
June 26, 2023**

Dear Chair Garlick, Chair Lewis and Members of the Joint Committee on Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on bills relating to educational personnel as part of your June 26, 2023, hearing. I am submitting these comments on behalf of the 23,000-member American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA).

Many of the bills under consideration address issues of educator diversity, and that topic will be the focus of this written testimony.

I want to reiterate AFT MA's strong and unwavering commitment to increasing the number of diverse educators in our Commonwealth, as well as to creating the workplace conditions that will ensure their success, job satisfaction, and retention. We are pleased that your committee and the Legislature are prioritizing these goals.

An effective approach to educator diversity is multi-pronged and involves a shared commitment across all levels of education: state, district, school, and higher education. At a minimum, it should include:

- A state investment in scholarship/grant opportunities for individuals training to become educators at colleges and universities. These programs should cover not only tuition but also books and fees. Debt forgiveness programs may also be considered, but helping to cover up-front costs yields the greatest likelihood of successful program completion.
- A state and local investment in locally designed “grow your own” programs that nurture student-to-educator and paraprofessional-to-teacher pipelines. For example, a student-focused program might provide high school students with exposure to the education profession at an early age, followed by a financially supported pathway to a job in their home district. Para-to-teacher programs should provide financially supported education and certification pathways for paraprofessionals, many of whom have at least an associate degree and simply need an extra boost to complete their training and become outstanding teachers.

- A state and local investment in district-run teacher residency and apprenticeship programs. These programs would enable candidates for the teaching profession to gain valuable classroom experience under the direction of a skilled mentor teacher while they complete content and pedagogy courses at partner colleges and universities. Such programs may work particularly well for career changers who have specialized content knowledge (e.g., in STEM fields) but need to learn the art of teaching from experienced practitioners. These programs should help with tuition and ideally pay a stipend that allows candidates to cover basic living expenses while learning on the job.
- State-established routes to educator certification that provide alternatives to the MTEL exams, as historically these exams have been shown to create barriers to entry for educators of color and educators whose first language is not English. For those who do take MTEL exams, the fees should be waived, with the cost shared by the state and districts.
- Concerted and transparent efforts by the state, districts and schools to review and update recruitment and hiring practices to remove systemic barriers for educators of color.
- Concerted and transparent efforts by the state, districts and schools to create the working conditions—including antiracist and culturally responsive workplaces, mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, and competitive compensation—that will retain educators of color (and educators generally).

With these priorities in mind, we examined the bills under consideration as part of your June 26 hearing.

We applaud **S. 286, An Act Ensuring Diversity in Public Education**, as a solid first step towards creating non-MTEL alternative pathways to teacher certification. We support this bill but believe it's only one piece of a larger strategy.

In our assessment, the bill that holds the greatest promise for achieving the aims articulated above is **S.311, An Act Relative to Educator Diversity**. This bill is identical to the one already vetted and reported out favorably by your committee last session. It is comprehensive and thoughtfully formulated and holds stakeholders across all levels of education accountable for action. We strongly support it.

The components of S.311 that we find praiseworthy include:

- the creation of alternative non-MTEL pathways to teacher certification
- the requirement for all districts to create plans to recruit and retain diverse educators consistent with state-established guidelines
- mandatory collection and public reporting of educator diversity data at both the state and local levels
- the creation of diversity, equity and inclusion officers/teams and advisory councils at the local level
- diversity and implicit bias training for all educators

- the requirement for all educator preparation programs to implement plans to increase the diversity of program completers
- the establishment of an educator diversity grant program. Notably, this grant program could be used to fund some of the strategies described above, such as para-to-teacher pipelines and in-house teacher residency programs.

We look forward to working with your committee and the Legislature to get this important bill across the finish line.

In contrast to S.311, which holds so much promise, I want to briefly mention our opposition to a bill that would have the opposite effect of what we're trying to achieve—**S.340** (H.583 in the House). Instead of bolstering efforts to recruit and retain educators of color, the bill would undermine the job security of all educators, including educators of color, by effectively gutting long-standing professional teacher status (PTS) rights for educators. The bill would also hurt students, including students of color, as teachers – through the eradication of their PTS protections – would feel less secure in advocating for their students' needs. We ask you to see this ill-conceived and divisive proposal for what it is – a diversion from the real issues at hand. We urge you to oppose S.340.

In closing, we are excited about pending legislative efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of diverse educators, particularly S.311. We stand ready to work with you as partners to pass this important legislation. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or AFT MA's legislative agent, Mike Canavan, with follow-up questions or comments.

Sincerely,



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cc: Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler
Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley
Mike Canavan, AFT MA Legislative Agent