



February 14, 2023

Senator Ruth Ward, Chair  
Senate Education Committee

**Re: Support SB 217**

Madame Chair and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Megan Tuttle, and I am here representing NEA-NH and our more than 17,000 educators across the state, most of whom work in our K-12 public schools. I am here to testify in strong support of SB 217, establishing a rural and underserved educator incentive program. Our students deserve to have a high quality educator in each one of their classes, and as this committee is aware from the work of the Educator Shortage Committee, we have a tremendous workforce shortage in our K-12 schools. This shortage existed before the pandemic but has been exacerbated by it and now is the time for New Hampshire to act to address this need through a variety of avenues. We see SB 217 as one of the tools in our toolbelt to address this need.

As a state, we are competing for workforce with our neighbors and states around the country. We have seen an increase in states implementing programs such as this, as one of the ways they are tackling this crisis. Idaho recently passed a similar law in their 2022 session and in its first year has already received 764 grant applications and the program has already begun to help out hundreds of applicants with incentive payments.

SB 217 bill could mean up to \$12,000 over a 4-year period for early educators who are trying to grapple with paying off loans while also trying to afford the ability to buy a home. These are real dollars particularly when you are talking about what are modest starting salaries for educators in our state. The median starting salary for a teacher with a BA in New Hampshire was around \$40,000 but that figure varies widely depending on the school district, as the lowest district according to our 2021 data was in the mid to low \$30,000's. Starting salaries for those with a Master's degree was slightly higher but this underscores why a loan repayment program such as the one in SB 217 is so important. This says to prospective educator candidates that we value the work that you will be doing for our students and we want to help ease one of the barriers to achieving the steps necessary to enter this profession. In a recent survey conducted by NEA nationally, nearly half of all educators took out student loans to pay for college and they still owe on average \$58,700 and among those, one in seven still owes more than \$105,000.

This is not the first time New Hampshire has embarked on this path to meet a critical workforce need. The Division of Public Health under the Department of Health and Human Services established the State Loan Repayment Programs (SLRP) to provide funds to health care professionals working in areas of the state designated as being medically underserved and are willing to serve for a minimum of 3 years in such areas. By all measures, this has been a successful program and can serve as evidence of the effectiveness of having this kind of aid available. While the SLRP was able to recently take advantage of ARPA funding to significantly expand its reach, we think starting with this modest amount of state funding will be a solid start to this program which may one day grow if it proves effective.

When I first started teaching in 1999, I was on the negotiations team for the Keene Education Association. One of the ideas I came up with was just this – a student loan repayment program. It was for teachers within their first 5 years and was limited to \$1500 a year for a few years. It was proposed and went into effect. It was the only contract in the area to have something like it. It made Keene stand out as a district and offered something that the surrounding towns did not have. Voting Ought to Pass on SB 217 can do the same thing for NH –

As I stated earlier, as states tackle the educator workforce shortage in significant ways, we do not want New Hampshire to be left behind without this as one of the tools in its tool belt. Most importantly for our students we want to be able to say we did everything we could to help strengthen the pipeline of future educators so that they have the professionals they need to receive a world class education in the Granite State.

Respectfully submitted,



Megan Tuttle

President