

3/2/2023

Dear House Labor Committee Members,

I am here today to voice support for House Bill 4044, which will repeal the punitive aspects of PA 152.

First, a brief introduction. My name is Zachary Kasprzak. I'm a science teacher and swimming coach at Howell Public Schools. I've been working at Howell since 2003, and I have been teaching since graduating from Wayne State University in 1999. I've been honored to have been chosen by my colleagues to represent their interests at the bargaining table for over a decade. This year will be the 5th contract I've helped to negotiate for the Howell Education Association MEA/NEA Local Affiliate.

Simply put, PA 152 is terrible policy that was ill-intended and punishing from the outset and it needs to go. It destroyed the assumption that more experience and education is valuable. In Howell, up until PA 152, we have always operated under the assumption that a year of service was worth a year of credit to move up on the step scale of the salary chart, and that additional high level university degrees meant an additional way to be recognized for the value of a teacher's own level of expertise. PA 152 wiped away that assumption, provided a financial carrot for school districts to drag their feet and engage in unnecessarily protracted negotiations, while simultaneously wielding a financial stick against teachers pushing them to agree to a decade of mediocre contracts. No settled contract meant no need for districts to fairly compensate their teachers' additional experience and education. No settled contract under PA 152 has a coercive aspect that allows school districts to create deepening levels of financial hardship for teachers who are already unfairly compensated in comparison to those in other professions requiring a similar education level and commitment.

Combined with the fiscal austerity of the Great Recession, PA 152 shifted the paradigm of step increases being "automatic" to step increases becoming an additional battle that teachers needed to fight for, contract after contract. In Howell, I'd estimate at least 100 of my colleagues are still behind in terms of their salary step matching their actual years of service, due to this unfortunate door that PA 152 opened within the collective bargaining process. There is anger and bitterness among educators regarding this issue. Many question their decision to go into the profession because of it. Some have gotten out or moved on. By stripping away rights from frontline educators, PA 152 has made it harder to attract and retain qualified educators in our local schools. PA 152 is antithetical to the very intent of the collective bargaining process.

I support HB 4044 to repeal PA 152.

Thank you for your consideration,

Zach Kasprzak