

To: Members of the House Labor Committee:

Rep. Jim Haadsma, Chair

Rep. Denise Mentzer, Majority Vice Chair, Rep. Douglas Wozniak, Minority Vice Chair, Rep. Matt Koleszar, Rep. Amos O'Neal, Rep. Joey Andrews, Rep. Jaime Churches, Rep. Dylan Wegela, Rep. Mike Mueller, and Rep. Tom Kunse

From: David Gott, Former Teacher Haslett Public Schools, Former President of the Haslett Education Association, Retired Teacher

March 2, 2023

Mr. Chairperson, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity for me to speak with you in support of HB 4044. I am truly excited that this committee is discussing a solution to one part of the albatross that was created during one of the darkest moments in decades for Public Education in Michigan. Of course, I'm referring to PA 54. I am grateful to this committee for allowing me to speak from my perspective as a retired educator that at that time, was teaching high school, middle school and active in several associations including leadership of my local education association.

To be Frank, there are many negative effects with PA 54, but as a person that does tend to see the brighter side of things, I would like to point out three of the biggest issues and then the positives that will be incurred by putting HB 4044 to the floor for a vote.


We are currently experiencing a teacher shortage that has been festering for many years and has now become a clear barrier to the longevity and health of this profession that so many of us love. When the rights of frontline educators were being stripped away a decade ago, the ability to attract and retain qualified educators to our local schools was also eroded. There is no viability in any profession if there isn't a strong vibrant pipeline filled with new, eager professionals that aspire to take the place of those that are experienced and departing the profession. Now we are in a crisis so great that prerequisites and qualifications are being removed in the desperate hope that some will jump in to plug the holes that are continuing to emerge as educators leave the field. HB 4044 will take a step in the right direction of restoring some of those important rights and sending out the message that Public Education in Michigan is not to be a job, but a valued profession once again.

PA 54 further tilted the scales out of balance in its punitive approach by placing the entire burden to settle a contract upon the Units representing the staff of our K-12 institutions. With PA 54 in place, you can't even bargain in good faith, with the knowledge that if there is no settlement before the contract expires, all members won't be recognized for the experience, wisdom and knowledge gained during the year. This demoralizing philosophy is demonstrated in the total freeze of steps, lanes, and the heaping of insurance increases upon the employees. With HB 4044, we would take a great step toward recognizing that educator's working conditions are students' learning conditions. HB 4044 would be a great step toward restoring basic workplace rights to Michigan educators and start to show that public education is going to be valued once again.

Finally, collective bargaining rights provide educators with a voice in our careers, as well as protections against decisions that could harm our ability to do our jobs and serve the students and parents. The State has taken some serious steps in undoing some of the damage done to Public Education in previous years. PA 54 is so unhealthy and prohibitive to bargaining in good faith as it creates a sense of shame upon all of us in public education. The message is, "If a new contract isn't solved through the process of collective bargaining before the expiration of the old contract, then it must be the fault of the employees and they should be punished". Personally, my salary grew a grand total of \$3800 over a twelve year period. I cannot even begin to express the struggle that this created for my family and I, as I was torn between the career and mission that I loved and trying to provide for them. It forced me to take on additional work, additional jobs, and stretch myself beyond what would be considered by most to be healthy. PA 54 created the need to accept those years with no increase to pay, to accept the additional taxation on benefits, to sacrifice before having further burden placed on the entire employee group. Unfortunately, many of the young people that we are charged with educating, who know how much we care about them, and who look up to us also saw that stress, pain and demoralized expressions. I would speculate that many of them that may have chosen this profession and could have become some of our best and brightest educators chose to find a different path because they saw. I feel guilt when I see my own two kids preparing for other professions, as I wonder if I could have done something more to hide the shame and reality of working in a profession that had been stripped of its value. However, with HB 4044 you will be restoring some of the balance to the collective bargaining process, and that balance will be seen as value. Value that is being placed on all who are a part of public education and charged with taking care of the children. The children who will become tomorrow's leaders, problem solvers, legislatures, doctors, public servants, lawyers, pilots, nurses, researchers, musicians, educators and so much more.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, and Committee members for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of HB 4044. I truly appreciate each member of this committee and your service to all Michiganders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David H. Gott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

David H. Gott
Retired Public Educator