

MTA President Merrie Najimy's Testimony on H.2620 and S.1791

Thank you, Chairs Brady and Gordon and the members of the committee, for the opportunity to join you here today, and to Rep. Doherty and Senator Velis for their leadership in filing this bill. My name is Merrie Najimy, and I'm the president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association.

On behalf of the 115,000 members of the MTA, I urge you to quickly and favorably report out H.2620 and S.1791. Thank you.

For decades, well before the pandemic caused unprecedented disruption in our public schools, educators have been unsung heroes in our communities.

With rising economic inequality and weakening social safety nets, schools and educators have — de facto — become that safety net, all while schools have been chronically under-resourced.

We do it out of a deep love for our profession and our students. And it has come with financial, psychological, and physical costs to educators.

With COVID-19, educators reinvented methods and modes of education, working harder than ever before, while simultaneously fighting to win workplace health and safety measures to protect the entire school community. Many educators were also caring for their own families. The trauma was compounded by a DESE that kept us in constant chaos by routinely imposing last-minute changes to regulations and offering insufficient resources to meet the moment.

Throughout the pandemic — and continuing to this day — educators have been expected to put their lives on the line. For some, it is simply not a viable option, given the status of their own health or that of family members they care for.

This bill takes a thoughtful approach to addressing the challenges and needs of both veteran teachers and the communities they serve.

You will hear more from educators who have served their communities for decades and who have stood by their students and their schools throughout this crisis but are nonetheless fearful for their own health or that of family members. They are facing an impossible choice: put themselves or vulnerable family members at risk or jeopardize a dignified and financially secure retirement.

Dedicated public servants who have committed their lives to the children of the Commonwealth should not be forced to make that choice.

Passing this bill shows your commitment to them and that you value their work.

Thank you.