

Kaitlin Eaton

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Good morning Madame Chairs and Members of the Joint Education Committee,

I want to thank you all for this opportunity to offer my testimony in support of House Bill H340.

My name is Kaitlin Eaton. I am a 4th grade teacher in Springfield. I am about to enter my third year of teaching. My experience with high-stakes testing is unfortunately, not as young.

During what was either their second or third test in a two week span, one of my kids made eye contact with me and then shouted at me: “MS.EATON, YOU DON’T GET IT! YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT THIS IS LIKE!” I replied: “Yes. I do.”

I am a product of high-stakes testing. I am a terrific test taker. From grades 4-10, I attended MCAS prep Saturday school, after-school and mandatory elective. I have long awaited the opportunity to speak out against high-stakes testing. When I was a student, we didn’t have to like it, but we had to accept that our real learning could happen in April. That’s when the lead vest of testing was lifted.

While working toward becoming an educator, I thought I experienced the worst of high-stakes testing. I didn’t foresee the early years of my career being filled with the current volume and frequency of standardized tests. Nor did I foresee helping students as young as mine cope

with anxiety I have never seen before and frankly, am not equipped to provide the necessary support for.

A scene from the movie adaptation of “*Matilda*” offers a perfect visual for what it is like to teach and learn in a level 4 school. The scene is when Miss Honey is preparing for their headmaster, The Trunchbull to teach their class that day. Miss Honey delivers commands such as: “Put away the art projects, put away anything colorful...” The students know the drill and get to work disguising everything an elementary school classroom is meant to be in order meet The Trunchbull’s demands. I find humor in that scene because of how easily a comparison can be drawn between the fictional-villain and high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing is an actual villain. It promotes a culture and climate of fear within all roles of education, from administrators, to teachers, to students.

It's a year of firsts for our school. This is our first year as level 4, our first year taking PARCC and for the vast majority of our students, this is their first year with formal music and art classes. When I transition my students from Art or Music I notice success and positive behavior changes from students that struggle in classes where core subjects are being taught. Often, as we walk down the hall, I can't shake the thought of: “*We're level 4. When are they going to take these classes and professionals from us and replace them with some new thing that boasts raising test scores?*”

Arriving to school on testing days is the worst. I put my game face on, walk in and try to make the morning seem as normal, because I know that my students don't need any more stress

on their plates. As they sit down with their breakfast, I'm just about an hour away from anxiety-breaths and heavy sobs complete with snot-nose and tears. I accept that I'm about to feel resented by 15 of the people I care about the most. They know high-stakes testing is not my fault, but I'm the one to hand them their test and tug it out from underneath them when they break-down, because once again, they didn't finish in the allotted time.

Our students deserve an education that provides them with the tools to: "lead lives as participants in the political, social and economic life of the Commonwealth..." And we, as highly-qualified professionals deserve the autonomy to lead them to that education, no matter which district we serve and without fear for our employment. It is my hope that a moratorium goes into effect so that a task-force will be assembled and that this task force will recognize the humans suffering within the culture of high-stakes testing. I'll end with the campaign slogan that helped one of my fourth graders to a student council election landslide victory: "Less tests, less stress".

Thank you once again for your time and consideration of my words on House bill H340.