

From: [Felicia Homberger](#)
To: [Lisa Diesslin](#)
Subject: Pension Reform- Written Testimony
Date: Friday, March 3, 2023 2:02:50 PM

Dear Ms. Diesslin,

Please include my comments below in the written testimony on pension reform.

When I graduated from my masters program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1996, my students asked me “Why would you go to Harvard and become a teacher?” They couldn’t fathom why somebody who was highly educated would go into a field that was not well paid or regarded. If we want high quality education with qualified teachers in the state of Minnesota, this can’t be the view our young people have of the field, and I am afraid it has only gotten worse.

Research shows that the most significant factor in the quality of a child’s education is the quality of their teacher. I keep hearing that there are so many things to fund in education, that there may not be enough left for pension reform. My question is if the quality of the teacher is the most powerful factor in the quality of our children’s education, why wouldn’t we prioritize that?

When I became a teacher, I knew that I would not get the pay or bonuses that are common in the corporate world, but I did expect the benefits. I learned from my mother who was a teacher in the state of Wisconsin, that a strong pension was what teachers got since they didn’t get the pay/bonuses that are prevalent in the private sector.

There are many reasons that pension reform is critical at this time. First, we are not going to be able to attract young people to this field if we don’t fix pensions. One of my most talented students in the last few years is thinking about being a teacher, but I can’t recommend it when she would have to teach for almost 40 years until she is 66. The second reason we need to fix pensions is that some of our highly qualified teachers who are in their 40’s are finding that they have so long until they can retire that they are leaving the field to pursue other careers. Why would we want to lose this talent? But the main reason to fund pension reform is it is the best thing our state could do for our students. Some people think that pension reform is about teachers and not kids. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Teachers have to put in hours and hours above and beyond what they are paid for to provide high quality instruction and support to our students. If we are told that our pensions don’t matter, that we aren’t a priority, why would we continue to volunteer all this extra time? Pension reform is necessary to not only attract and retain teachers but to honor the dedicated service of teachers in support of the children in Minnesota.

Finally, as someone who has led the feminist club at my high school and is committed to empowering young women, I would be remiss not to mention the inequity that I am seeing

with pensions in the state of Minnesota. Male dominated fields like police and fire have much better options. They are not expected to work as long to earn their full pension , while in education which a female dominated field, we are expected to do with less because it is unrealistic to expect people to go to 66, and if they don't, they are significantly penalized.

While I understand that funding is always a concern, at a time when we have a 17.5 billion dollar surplus, it is time to fix pensions for teachers. We have weathered the bad times in our state's economy, not getting raises or even cost of living increases; now is the time to support the teachers in the state of Minnesota with pension reform which will ensure high quality education for the children in our state. If this doesn't happen, I worry about what our education system will look like in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Felicia Homberger
Language Arts Teacher at Hopkins High School
1999-Present



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