

Honorable Chair Representative Her and Pension Committee Members,

I am writing to you today about the important topic of pension reform. As you may know, our schools are facing unique challenges as they are faced with the fall-out of a global pandemic, modern technology, political divide, families under stress and mental health issues. This has placed unprecedented stress on educators. A full career of public service during ANY circumstances should not exceed 35 years. Minnesota's Tier II system does not allow for a full pension until age 66, which is a full decade later than Tier 1 teachers and requires a 44 year commitment from many educators who are in high stress situations daily. This is not palatable to many and it contributes to our difficulties staffing our schools. In fact, Minnesota actually has thousands of licensed teachers who have stepped away from the classroom to work in other fields. Sadly, young coworkers of mine are discussing this same option. It is time that we take action to stop this trend by investing in our people.

My parents were public school teachers in Minnesota, my uncle was a teacher, and my husband is a middle school teacher. My husband and I started our careers in Colorado. We were proud to come home to Minnesota to work and raise our family in the "education state." Our hiring superintendent, our financial advisor and our Tier I coworkers all told us that there had been "some changes" in the pension, but it would be fixed because.. it HAD to be fixed. We bought our years of service from Colorado, paying into TRA only to now recognize that the pension reform "can" has been kicked down the road for 3 decades. With Tier II teachers approaching retirement many are becoming informed and are ready to take an active role in seeing this change. Now is the time to do the hard work to recruit and retain teachers with an investment in education!

As a speech language pathologist I chose a career path that requires a master's degree as well as a clinical fellowship year. I spent 7 years working toward licensure and took a job of public service with lower wages with an expectation that benefits of a public service job would offset this. Due to the significant underfunding of such benefits in Minnesota, my 3 grown children are not choosing careers in our schools. My daughter is in her last year of graduate school majoring in speech/language pathology. There is a HUGE demand for special education staff, particularly speech/language pathologists in our schools. My daughter and many of her classmates are choosing different paths, not because they don't love children or desire to serve their communities, but because they realistically need to select a path that will pay the bills and provide for a secure future. We can take steps to correct this and we should as our schools are required by law to provide services to our children who need them.

I am asking you to support pension reform by showing your support for SF2222 (Wolgamott) and HF1938 (Frentz), bills stating 62 years of age OR 35 years of service as eligibility for full pension benefits for Minnesota educators. Thousands of my coworkers who believe in our schools and communities are watching and eager to see our state make this critical investment in our schools.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Ann Reed
Speech/Language Pathologist and 32 year educator