

Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill N. 1220

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This written testimony is in opposition to HOUSE BILL NO. 1220 that focuses on the permission for institutions under the control of the state board of higher education to develop accelerated degrees for high-demand occupations. Although the major discussion on this bill thus far has primarily focused on the preparation of nurses, it would appear likely that the passage of this bill would lead to a similar focus on other high-demand occupations, such as the teachers.

Throughout the last few decades, teachers and school administrators in America's schools have received a tremendous amount of public scrutiny for the poor academic performance of their students. This public scrutiny has led state and national policy makers to put pressure on teacher education programs to improve and to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the development of effective teachers. The U.S. Department of Education has created initiatives designed to improve teacher education, primarily driven by research that reveals the positive effect that qualified and high-performing teachers have on improving student learning.

As a Dean of the Liffrig Family School of Education and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Mary, I have been a member of state committees and taskforces organized to find ways to improve the preparation of teachers. My participation on these committees has shown me that most people think that the best way to develop stronger teachers is to increase their content knowledge, which usually translates to more education or major specific courses. However, ask almost any school administrator and he/she will tell you is that it is not a teacher's content knowledge that causes them to fail as a teacher, but it is a teacher's (a) social and emotional intelligence, (b) problem-solving skills, (c) their awareness of a student's cognitive and emotional needs and (d) their ability to communicate efficiently.

At the University of Mary, we believe in the liberal arts and their value in providing the foundation needed for our preservice teachers to become effective high-performing teachers. We believe our liberal arts core enables our students to become men and women who are responsible citizens, persons of integrity and faith, and, at the same time, specialists in their chosen discipline of education. Our liberal arts core courses are designed to cultivate the mind

of our students and provide students with an understanding of how to solve problems, think critically, and express their ideas clearly and thoroughly.

The passage of this house bill would allow teacher preparation institutions to develop teacher education programs with 90 credits or less. This would most likely result in institutions dropping liberal arts courses from their teacher preparation programs of study. Without a liberal arts background, preservice teachers would not receive the coursework needed to help them succeed as a classroom teacher. In addition, current state and national teacher preparation accreditation agencies require liberal arts courses in all teacher preparation programs of study. For example, a licensed elementary education teacher is required to take courses in math, English, history, and science because they teach these subjects in the elementary education classroom.

Lastly, I believe allowing teacher education programs to reduce their program of study requirements may increase the number of students entering those programs, but it will not increase the quality of the graduates from those programs. If we really care about meeting the needs of the students in the K-12 classrooms in our state, the creation of a law that would most likely result in a reduction of the liberal arts courses is not the answer. It would result in less time to complete a degree, but it will not produce stronger professionals or more effective teachers.