

Good morning, members of the Senate Education committee. My name is Loren Nieuwsma and I am an English and Speech teacher at Mandan high school. Previously I taught at New Rockford-Sheyenne and Devils Lake. I am here today to testify against SB 2215.

While I could discuss why this bill is problematic on many different levels, I have decided to focus more on the logistics of the bill, particularly time and intent. For your knowledge, I have negotiated in every school that have taught in. I have learned that the process of negotiation is vital as a contract dictates pay, rights, and protections of the teacher and district. In an industry that is becoming ever more complicated and daunting, this process is necessary because unlike other jobs in this state, teachers are required to fulfill their contract in full or lose their license for a year. They don't have the luxury of leaving if something happens; they have to deal with it. The contract is there to support and protect them.

While most schools do start negotiating their contracts in January, most schools wait until the legislature finishes their session as the last item of business typically is education funding. Since they can't get the dollar amount sooner, collective bargaining already is stalled until the end of April. Given that this bill gives finite dates that limit time for bargaining, the process is rushed. To reduce time from both ends would mute the conversation needed to make a solid contract to protect both parties.

I do want to state that while it seems like bargaining is always an "us versus them" situation, in a healthy school district, it is not. In a healthy school district, both sides respect each other and understand that this process is necessary. Remember, while teaching is more vital than ever, this is still a job and teachers still have bills to pay as well as the desire to make the pay increase for their experience. To shorten this process down would reduce the chance for the teachers to make the proper advancements.

However, this leads me to my main biggest problem with this bill: intent. Since I started teaching 13 years ago, these types of bills have been passed in hopes to fix the problems of securing good teachers. Yet these bills continue to appear each and every year, and the number of new teachers entering the field continues to decrease. I have even had students say that they would like to become a teacher, but it just isn't worth it anymore after seeing these bills passed. Bills, such as silencing voices and concerns at the bargaining table in hopes to get a signature on a contract, is just putting a band aide on a gushing wound that is in need of stitches. It starts with recruiting more people to become teachers so there will be enough to fill all the jobs in the state. That will help fix the underlying problem; passing a bill that telling teachers their concerns only deserve a little amount of time at a bargaining table will not and could possibly cause even more problems.

I hope you consider not passing this bill as it doesn't fix the main problem. It just continues to mute the voices of good, hardworking teachers in the state by forcing their hand at the bargaining table.