

January 21, 2025


Dear Representative Ista,

My name is Melanie Unser and I am a 24-year veteran teacher currently working as a third-grade teacher in Fargo Public Schools. I am writing to support HB 1238. There are many reasons I support reducing the years needed for a teacher to earn a lifetime license. First, completing continuing education credits is incredibly expensive and time-consuming. Veteran teachers like me are getting the smallest increases in wages of all educators. Most of the big raises are going to the new hires to attract them to a field that is struggling to find qualified workers. Second, the state has already made it easier for people who did not go to school to earn education degrees to get teaching licenses. Why wouldn't North Dakota then reduce the requirements for those of us who have already put in the time, money, received the needed education (and continuing education), and have the experience? Also, it's rarely the veteran teachers who are leaving the field to worsen the teacher shortage; it is the younger, less experienced educators. Therefore, this is a way to incentivize educators to stay the course. Also, school districts are required to provide professional development throughout the school year, so all teachers already are getting many professional development opportunities to continually grow and improve their skills. Through another lens, teachers, especially elementary teachers, spend a lot of their own money on their classrooms. By not having to spend the money for more credits, we'd have more months to either spend directly on meaningful things for our classrooms and students or to use to pay our own bills for our families. Lastly, the best education is experience. People who have survived 20 years in the classroom have a wealth of knowledge about how to be impactful. That is something no professional development class can teach.

Representative Ista, teaching today is vastly different and markedly more difficult than it was when I started in 2001. There have been countless times I've wanted to leave the profession due to the current culture of education in our state and in our country. However, I stay for the children and because I have dedicated my life to working to positively impact the lives of the eight-year-olds in my charge. Being able to earn a lifetime licensure after 20 years would allow me to have more of my own money to spend on my own children's college tuition, as well as give me one small pat on the back for the sacrifices I've made financially and emotionally to stay in this grueling profession.

Thank you for listening and I pray this bill passes. Teachers could use one good thing going their way for a change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melanie H. Unser', written in a cursive style.

Melanie Hastings Unser