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Dr. Tony Smith
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street
Springfield IL 62777

James T. Meeks
Chairman
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street
Springfield IL 62777

January 2, 2019

Dear Supt. Smith and Rev. Meeks:

We are writing to raise our serious concerns with the proposed ISBE policy, "Teach Illinois - Strong Teachers, Strong Classrooms".

Raise Your Hand Action is a parent and citizen group that advocates for policies and legislation that purport and support high-quality, well-resource public education for all children through the state. We help parents connect in active networks covering legislative districts in Chicago and throughout the state.

Our concerns with the proposed Teach Illinois program include:

1. Does Teach Illinois adequately address the teacher shortage in Illinois?

While Teach Illinois purports to address the teacher shortage, it does not deal with its root causes. From our work with parents across the state, we know firsthand the obstacles and challenges of teaching in today's context.

For example, the rules do not address the impact of the recent two year budget impasse and the fiscal crisis facing our state. This has eroded the ability of universities to attract and retain students through affordable tuition and financial aid, as well as decreased funding for our public schools.

Teachers in our children's schools express concerns about the overuse of standardized testing, and about basing teacher performance evaluation heavily on these tests. They tell us about large class sizes, under-resourced classrooms, a lack of mentoring and support for new teachers, and an increasing workload. In addition, we have observed firsthand the undervaluation of the teaching profession.

Changing these working conditions would be a starting point for alleviating the teacher shortage in Illinois. We advocate for lower class sizes, sufficient wraparound services, a decreased emphasis on high-stakes standardized tests, and better salaries and benefits to attract qualified candidates.

2. Will Teach Illinois exacerbate inequity across the state's public school system?

We believe that the proposed rules have the potential to increase inequality across districts and worry that our states neediest and most vulnerable students & districts will lose out. Under-prepared teachers are most often placed in high-poverty, communities of color serving the most vulnerable students. As parents, we want all of our teachers to have a strong academic and pre-professional background. While ISBE argues that the non-university providers will be held to the same standards as universities, this is highly unrealistic. Long-time teacher education programs that are university-based draw from their own and others' ongoing research that is reviewed by external reviewers to inform practice. Non-university providers are not capable of offering content with the same depth, breadth, and experience.

Advising preservice teachers to do coursework for licensure that does not transfer for a future degree can place them into a professional dead-end. They might also be at risk for not being able to convert these kind of licenses if they move to another state.

There is a strong link between underprepared teachers and persistence in the profession. Research shows that new teachers do not perform as well as experienced ones, and there is a high rate of turnover in the first few years of teaching. Therefore, teacher attrition, this revolving door of educators, will directly impact the classroom experiences and educational opportunities of our children. Meanwhile, relatively well-resourced districts will be less likely to participate in Teach Illinois and instead will continue to employ professionally-prepared educators and offer them professional development and support.

All schools need highly-educated, fully-prepared teachers; good mentoring programs; and adequate funding to attract qualified candidates.

3. Who are the outside organizations that will administer these new licensure programs under Teach Illinois?

We don't know who these entities are and how they will be held accountable. They have no accreditation and no postsecondary regulation unlike teacher education programs that are part of colleges and universities. We wonder whether they have qualified instructors and meet standards for program quality? There is no guarantee.

And we are troubled that these rules will open the door to for-profit, unqualified companies seeing a business opportunity in teacher licensure. We have experienced outsourcing key functions to private companies in Chicago Public Schools, and they have been disastrous for our students: janitorial and building engineering, nursing services, and professional development.

For example, the SUPES professional development company brought to CPS by Barbara Byrd Bennett is a classic case of there being no true oversight of an outside entity, compounded by lack of attention to the quality of what it delivered, and whether there was any transfer of learning on the part of educators who were required to participate in their professional development sessions.

As parents and public school supporters, we urge ISBE to pursue a complex and multi-faceted approach to the teacher shortage in Illinois, one that addresses the root causes of this problem. We want the state

to continue to support high-quality teacher education programs from accredited and accountable institutions of higher learning.

We plan to alert the parents and citizens in Raise Your Hand Action's networks across the state to raise concerns about these proposed rules.

Sincerely,

Cassie Creswell and Wendy Katten
Directors, Raise Your Hand Action

cc: Senator Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant, Representative Fred Crespo, Representative Rita Mayfield