

Senate Education Committee Meeting

**Official Minutes
151st General Assembly
First Session**

**Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 28, 2021
11:30 a.m.
Virtual Zoom Meeting**

Meeting Attendance

Committee Members:

Present:

Senator Laura Sturgeon	Laura.Sturgeon@delaware.gov	302-744-4135
Senator Elizabeth Lockman	Elizabeth.Lockman@delaware.gov	302-744-4168
Senator Ernesto Lopez	Ernesto.Lopez@delaware.gov	302-744-4136
Senator David Sokola	David.Sokola@delaware.gov	302-744-4139
Senator Colin Bonini	Colin.Bonini@delaware.gov	302-744-4169

Staff:

Anthony Bernadzikowski	Anthony.Bernadzikowski@delaware.gov	302-477-4629
Taylor Hawk	Taylor.Hawk@delaware.gov	
Valerie McCartan	Valerie.McCartan@delaware.gov	
Anna Shields	Anna.Shields@delaware.gov	

Attendees:

Marie	Pinkney	Marie.Pinkney@delaware.gov	Delaware State Senate
Rebecca	Calvello	rebecca.calvello@delaware.gov	delaware state senate
Sarah	Stowens	sstowens@rodelde.org	Rodel
Mary Nash	Wilson	marynash.wilson@delaware.gov	OMB
Verna	Hensley	vhensley@esdel.org	Easterseals Delaware & MD Eastern Shore

Deborah	Gottschalk	deborah.gottschalk@delaware.gov	Division of Research
Carrie	Cole	carrie.cole@byrdgomes.com	ByrdGomes
Barry	Townsend	barrytownsend@mac.com	N/A
Janice	Durham	janice.durham@delaware.gov	House of Representatives
Tammy	Croce	tjcroce@edasa.org	Delaware Association of School Administrators
Brian	Moore	brian.moore@doe.k12.de.us	DDOE
Juliet	Murawski	juliet.murawski@doe.k12.de.us	DOE
Robert	Grey	robert.grey@doe.k12.de.us	DOE
Mary Ann	Mieczkowski	maryann.mieczkowski@doe.k12.de.us	DOE
Emily	Cunningham	emily.cunningham@doe.k12.de.us	Department of Education
Megan	Willey	Megsc7@yahoo.com	Willey Family School Days
Susan	Bunting	susan.bunting@doe.k12.de.us	DOE
pia	stokes	pzstokes@desu.edu	Delaware State University
Roman	Battaglia	roman.battaglia1@gmail.com	Delaware Public Media
Robert	Overmiller	rdo1979@aol.com	RDO Refrigeration
Linnea	Bradshaw	linnea.bradshaw@psb.k12.de.us	Professional Standards Board
Kristin	Dwyer	kristin.dwyer@gmail.com	DSEA

Senator Sturgeon introduced the Committee and brought the meeting to order at 11:36 a.m. A motion carried to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

Agenda:**SB 99 (Pinkney) - AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO HIGH NEEDS EDUCATOR STUDENT LOANS.**

SYNOPSIS: This Act makes minority educators eligible for the High Needs Educator Student Loan Repayment Program. This Act also makes technical corrections to conform existing law to the standards of the Delaware Legislative Drafting Manual.

Senator Sturgeon yielded to Senator Pinkney to give an overview and synopsis of the legislation.

Senator Pinkney thanked Senator Sturgeon and explained that the intent of the bill was to reduce educator student loan debt and to reduce the loan debt disparity between minority and nonminority educators. She said that this disparity contributed to a lack of teacher diversity to match the diversity of many student bodies in Delaware.

Senator Sturgeon asked Senator Pinkney if this bill provided loan aid as an upfront payment or if it was a loan repayment program. Sen. Pinkney replied that it was a loan repayment program, with the bill helping specifically “minority” educators and not simply people of color; she noted that in the future demographics may change and so may the communities of need who fall under the term “minority”.

Senator Lockman expressed her support for the bill. She asked if the bill replied to racial and ethnic minorities only; Sen. Pinkney said that it did.

Senator Lockman also asked if there was a ceiling on the amount of aid offered given the lack of a fiscal note. Sen. Pinkney said that the bill did not expand the financial liability of the aid awards, rather the eligibility of who can receive them. **Kristin Dwyer** of the DSEA noted that the program has a set fiscal floor and ceiling for the amount of aid given. **Juliet Murawski** of the Delaware DOE said that the total award amount was \$700,000.

Senator Sturgeon asked if the bill could be expanded to other minorities (such as religious minorities). Sen. Pinkney said that that was not in the current bill but that she liked the idea.

Senator Lockman asked where the new element of racial/ethnic minorities would fit into the prioritization of access to the program. **Juliet Murawski** of the Delaware Department of Education said that applicants were ranked based on their debt-to-income ratio; no preference is given to those who meet more than one eligibility status.

Senator Lopez asked if all Delaware educators would qualify for this program already. Sen. Pinkney said that the purpose of this legislation was to target high-needs populations. **Juliet Murawski** said that many educators already do qualify for the program based on either being a high-needs individual, teaching in a high-needs area, and (with the passage of this bill) being part of a racial/ethnic minority group.

Senator Sokola said that he had heard from Kristen Dwyer that Delaware teachers had an unusually high student loan debt burden. He noted that the legislature – not the Governor, as had been brought up earlier – has the imperative to appropriate funds to address that issue. He said that the program was a worthy cause.

Senator Bonini asked if the original intent of the program as founded was to help those in high-needs areas. Sen. Pinkney said that it was. Sen. Bonini asked if SB 99’s passage would mean that racial/minority educators would no longer specifically have to teach in a high-needs area to earn access to the program. Sen. Pinkney said that they would not and that SB 99 was necessary to help increase teacher retention among racial minority communities. Sen. Bonini expressed concern with that expansion of eligibility. Sen. Sturgeon interjected and noted that students broadly benefit from a more diverse teacher base – even in privileged communities. Sen. Bonini said that SB 99 would alter the loan program from its original intent and expressed concern about that.

Senator Lockman expressed her support for the bill and noted that having increased diversity in school staff is a critical need.

Senator Sturgeon then opened the floor to public comment.

Kristen Dwyer of the DSEA spoke in support of SB 99 and said it addressed shortages in critical needs areas.

Robert Overmiller spoke against SB 99 and said that it was unconstitutional.

SB 99 was reported out of the Committee – 1 Favorable; 4 On Its Merits; 0 Unfavorable

HB 89 (Williams) - AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

SYNOPSIS: This act will allow a critical need reimbursement to be distributed directly to an institute of higher education or Secretary of Education approved Alternative Routes to Teacher Licensure and Certification program for an eligible teacher who is taking

noncredit-earning seminars or workshops or credit-bearing coursework in order to attain a Standard Certification in a state-approved critical need area.

Sen. Sturgeon deferred to the bill's sponsor, Representative Kim Williams.

Rep. Kim Williams thanked the Chair and the Committee members. She read the bill's synopsis and said that the bill was meant to increase teacher certifications by helping them with the means of doing so. She said that the program in the bill already existed but that HB 89 would serve as a means of updating it.

Senator Sturgeon expressed her support for the bill.

Senator Sturgeon then opened the floor to public comment.

Dr. Tammy Croce of the Delaware Association for School Administrators expressed support for the bill on behalf of her organization and thanked Rep. Williams for bringing it forward.

Robert Overmiller of the Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens expressed support for the bill on his and his organization's behalf.

Kristen Dwyer of the DSEA expressed support for the bill on her and her organization's behalf.

HB 89 was reported out of the Committee – 0 Favorable; 6 on its Merits; 0 Unfavorable

HB 104 (Griffith) - AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT.

SYNOPSIS: This Act moves the date by which the Department of Education shall submit its annual report to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council from August 1 to October 15 of each year. Moving the date to October 15 will better accommodate the data collection, quality control, and certification process utilized by the Department of Education. Schools and districts are required to enter their data by July 1 and the process of verifying the information and making any corrections necessary to certify the data is usually finished by October 1.

Sen. Sturgeon deferred to Representative Krista Griffith, the bill's prime sponsor.

Rep. Krista Griffith explained that the bill was a technical change designed to give the Department of Education more time to review the data for accuracy.

Sen. Sturgeon opened the floor to public comment.

Robert Overmiller expressed support for the legislation on his behalf on behalf of the Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens.

HB 104 was reported out of the Committee – 0 Favorable; 6 on its Merits; 0 Unfavorable

SB 106 (Wilson) - AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN HOMESCHOOLS.

SYNOPSIS: This Act makes students who attend homeschools eligible for the same services for children with disabilities as students who attend private schools in a manner that allows federal funds to pay for the services. This Act is the result of discussions regarding Senate Bill No. 19, which would make homeschool students eligible for speech therapy services, and accomplishes the goal of Senate Bill No. 19 because through meaningful consultation, speech therapy services are often included in the services provided to students who attend private schools. This Act also makes technical corrections to conform existing law to the standards of the Delaware Legislative Drafting Manual.

Senator Sturgeon deferred to Senator David Wilson, the bill's prime sponsor.

Senator Wilson explained that the bill was the result of a constituent contacting him about their homeschooled child's need for speech pathology services and that it was meant to replace SB 19. He said that it was the product of collaboration with the Delaware Department of Education and that it addressed key developmental needs for homeschooled children.

Senator Sturgeon asked how this bill differed from SB 19. Sen. Wilson responded that the earlier iteration of the bill was changed to give express access for the students to federal funding and thanked Debbie Gottschalk for her work on putting the bill together.

Senator Lockman said that she looked forward to supporting the bill.

Senator Lopez thanked Senator Wilson for taking action on behalf of his constituents and thanked Secretary Bunting and her staff.

Senator Bonini echoed Sen. Lopez's comments and thanked Sec. Bunting and Sen. Wilson for persevering on the legislation to reach a solution.

Senator Sokola thanked Senator Wilson for taking action on this legislation and working to get it done. He also thanked Deanna Killen for her help getting the relevant parties together.

Secretary Susan Bunting thanked Emily Cunningham, Deanna Killen, and Debbie Gottschalk for their work on getting the bill together.

Sen. Sturgeon opened the floor to public comment.

Verna Hensley spoke in favor of the legislation on behalf of EasterSeals. She noted the value that speech therapy had played in her life and thanked the Department of Education and Sen. Wilson.

Dr. Tammy Croce of DASA expressed her support for the bill and thanked Sen. Wilson for working with the relevant parties.

Mary Ann Mieczkowski of the DOE expressed support for the bill on the DOE's behalf.

Megan Willey expressed her support for the bill as a mother of 3 homeschooled children who would greatly benefit from the passage of the legislation.

Robert Overmiller expressed his support for the bill on behalf of the GACEC.

Senator Wilson gave concluding remarks thanking the Department of Education (Sec. Bunting, Emily Cunningham, et al.), Debbie Gottschalk, Sen. Sturgeon, and Sen. Sokola.

SB 106 was reported out of the Committee – 4 Favorable; 2 on its Merits; 0 Unfavorable

Senator Sturgeon entertained a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 12:48pm.