



To: Chairman Pavlov and Members of the Senate Education Committee
From: David Hecker, AFT Michigan President
Ivy Bailey, Detroit Federation of Teachers Interim President
Re: Senate Bills 713, 714, 715
Date: February 2, 2016

AFT Michigan opposes Senate Bill 713, 714 and 715; bills which seek to expand the impact and severity of existing school employee anti-strike laws. These bills are unconstitutional in their violation of free speech and due process, potentially career-ending for teachers, and harm children by reducing education funding.

These bills stem from recent activities of Detroit teachers who, after years of unsuccessfully trying to bring to light the deplorable physical state of many Detroit Public School buildings as well as absurd class sizes and drastic cuts to compensation, all of which have led to a 170 person teacher shortage, have done what they deemed necessary to bring attention to these hazardous conditions. We are sorry to see that, instead of taking action to address the chronically poor state of DPS infrastructure, providing funding to reduce class sizes and for DPS to be able to retain and attract teachers for their students, the Michigan Legislature has decided to attack the messenger instead. It is reminiscent of the current crisis in Flint, where for months state officials ignored those who demanded attention to the issue of toxic water. Now, instead of taking action to clean up schools leaking gas, infested with rats and mold, suffering from leaking roofs and classrooms, and burdened with a dearth of teaching materials and equipment, we are here instead watching bills be debated that seek to strike down any who would dare raise their voice in complaint.

For the record, DFT neither organized nor arranged for the spontaneous expression we are seeing from DPS personnel in response to these horrid conditions. However, we understand our members' anger and frustration when their repeated efforts to address these problems have fallen upon deaf ears. Sadly, our elected officials in Lansing seem more eager to use this as an opportunity to again come after the women and men who teach our children, often times in conditions none of us would tolerate for our children or ourselves.

These bills also propose stripping teaching certificates from teachers who violate this act. So when conditions for students and teachers are deplorable, when school administration refuses to address these issues, a teacher's certificate could be revoked and her career destroyed.

By reducing the time for the Michigan Employment Relations Commission to conduct hearings and issue its decision and order to two days, coupled with allowing hearings for multiple people to be consolidated, this legislation erodes due process which is the constitutional right of every American.

Moreover, the provision of SB 715 would reduce state funding to a school district if the administration does not impose fines, merely punishes the kids.

Some legislators have recently called for all DPS workers to be fired in response to their actions. In response, we can only ask whether these legislators would send their own children to schools that had black mold, vermin, pails on desks to catch water, room so cold students where coats or so warm they take off what they

can. We invite all those on this committee to come and see for yourselves the conditions our members are forced to work in.

As of yesterday, the City of Detroit has posted on its website the findings of safety inspections at 28 buildings and health inspections at 4 buildings operated by Detroit Public Schools, finding more than 300 code violations. We've provided copies of these reports to you.

On behalf of our members in Detroit and around the state, we ask this committee to change its focus away from punishing those who speak out against injustice, and toward addressing those injustices themselves.