



TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION / NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Good Morning Chairman Zerwas and committee members. My name is Lisa Dawn-Fisher, and I represent the 65,000 educators and support staff who are members of the Texas State Teachers Association. We are on HB 1. Your deliberations on the budget will have an impact on all of the 650,000 personnel serving 5.1 million Texas school children.

TSTA is very pleased to see the significant investment in public education that is represented in this budget through improvements to the Foundation School Program funding formulas along with new and expanded programs for early learning. We appreciate the additional funding for dual language and compensatory education as well.

While the bill provides much-needed funding for the schoolchildren of Texas, it fails to ensure that the educators supporting those children will receive a much-needed pay raise. My written testimony to the Committee includes recently released data that indicate that for the 2018–19 school year, Texas teachers are earning an average of \$54,100 per year, which falls \$7,600 of the national average \$61,782. About 40 percent of teachers hold second or even third jobs in order to support their families.

One reason that salaries fall short is that the Legislature has refused to increase the state's \$75 monthly contribution to school employees' health insurance for more than 17 years, even though rising health care costs continue to erode the take-home pay of thousands of educators. In fact, we have support staff whose entire paychecks are consumed by their health insurance premiums, and in some cases, they are writing checks to the district on payday just to maintain their insurance. Other members report going without maintenance medications and other routine health care needs.

Retired employees fare little better. We do thank the Legislature for the one-time transfer from the rainy-day fund next year that will maintain the current year premium and benefit levels for retiree health insurance, but the paychecks of retirees have remained stagnant since 2003. The average retiree receives an annuity of just over \$2,000 per month, and dependent care coverage can easily consume half of that check. Although there are efforts to shore up the retirement system, there are no permanent cost-of-living adjustments funded in the current budget.

This is unacceptable in a state where there is \$9 billion in new revenue for public education and a projected \$15 billion in the rainy-day fund. The state *can* and *must* ensure that active and retired public school employees who dedicate their lives to serving Texas schoolchildren make a living wage and have access to health care.