

Members of the Senate Education Policy and Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in regard to SF 819. The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) oversees the state standards required to be a licensed teacher in Minnesota.

PELSB has concerns over the changes proposed in this bill. As currently written, SF 819 would not require an individual to obtain a substitute teaching license (3-year short-call substitute license) from PELSB in order to serve as a substitute teacher in Minnesota schools.

To obtain a teaching license from PELSB, including a 3-year short-call substitute license, an individual must obtain a fingerprint-based background check of criminal databases maintained by both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA). While SF 819 requires a background check be conducted by the hiring district, the district would not need to obtain fingerprints or route the background check through the FBI as required by an individual applying for a license through PELSB (Minn. Stat. 122A.18, subdivision 8(b)). This would be a substantially weaker background check than what is currently required. Three years ago, the Legislature removed the ability for an individual to work in a classroom pending the results of an FBI fingerprint background check over concerns that the individual would have access to students without knowing their whole criminal history. This bill would waive a fingerprint background check for thousands of short-call substitutes.

Additionally, PELSB has oversight over all teachers licensed in Minnesota, including the ability to discipline a teacher holding a license. This bill would remove all short-call substitutes from requiring a license, allowing an individual with any number of potential ethical concerns that do not reach the level of a criminal offense (i.e., grooming, inappropriate restraints) to move from district to district. Under the current statute, PELSB has oversight of individuals holding a substitute license. As such, the Board has had occasion to take action to suspend or revoke licenses as a result of inappropriate conduct. This bill would remove the ability for any agency to hold that individual accountable for ethical violations.

While we understand the desire to streamline districts' ability to place substitutes into the classroom, this should not come at the expense of student safety. We hope legislators will reach out to PELSB to discuss other options to address district needs.

Sincerely,



Alex Liuzzi

PELSB, Executive Director



Brian Rappe

PELSB, Chair