

**Delaware House of Representatives**

**Rep. Debra Heffernan**

**For Immediate Release:**

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**Heffernan Bill Would Address Delaware’s**

**Substitute Teacher Shortage**

*HB 315 would allow schools to hire full-time substitute teachers*

DOVER – Amid a critical shortage statewide of substitute teachers, lawmakers have introduced legislation that would allow all public Delaware high schools, middle schools, and high-needs elementary schools to hire permanent full-time substitutes.

Sponsored by **Rep. Debra Heffernan, Rep. Kimberly Williams,** and **Sen. Laura Sturgeon,** House Bill 315 would provide funding for schools to hire up to two full-time substitute teachers beginning in the 2023-2024 school year.

Many school districts struggle to hire substitute teachers due to the per-diem pay rates, unpredictable schedules, and inadequate training. HB 315 would address these issues by creating full-time salaried substitute teacher positions with benefits. These positions would only be offered to individuals who have obtained an associate's or bachelor's degree from an accredited institution.

“The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how disruptive teacher shortages can be to our entire education system, negatively impacting students, parents, teachers, and administrators alike,” said **lead sponsor Rep. Heffernan.**

“By creating permanent substitute teacher positions—with fair pay, benefits, and professional development training— we can address our substitute teacher shortage, improve our educator pipeline, and give our schools another tool to increase teacher recruitment and retention.”

Substitute and teacher shortages pose severe operational challenges to schools and can be [detrimental to student learning](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/10/21/america-faces-a-substitute-teacher-shortage-and-disadvantaged-schools-are-hit-hardest/). An [October 2021 Education Week study](https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-bad-are-school-staffing-shortages-what-we-learned-by-asking-administrators/2021/10) found that two-thirds of schools nationwide are addressing substitute shortages by asking employees to take on additional responsibilities, which can contribute to educator burnout and negatively impact the quality of education students receive.

“Throughout this pandemic, our schools have relied on our substitutes more than ever before, and they have answered the call time and time again despite the low wages they are often paid and the minimal advance notice they are often given,” said **Sen. Laura Sturgeon**, chair of the Senate Education Committee and prime Senate sponsor of HB 315.

“It’s time we include substitute teachers in our unit count funding formula so our districts can hire full-time substitute teachers at a livable wage to stand at the ready when our schools and our children need them. And it’s time we build a workforce pipeline that will give our substitutes opportunities for advancement and give our schools a deeper pool of qualified and experienced job candidates.”

Schools monitor substitute teacher shortages using fill rates, which indicate the percentage of requests for substitute teachers that are able to be filled. In Delaware, school districts throughout the state regularly reported average monthly fill rates below 50% for the 2021-2022 school year.

“This bill provides the incentives needed to get qualified applicants in the door, but also provides the support and pathway to keep them into our highest need schools,” said **Rep. Kimberly Williams.** “We know that when we offer competitive salaries and benefits packages, support workers with meaningful professional development, and offer career pathways, we support employees to become dedicated and skilled professionals.”

In addition to a full-time position with benefits, permanent substitutes would have a pathway to becoming a certified teacher. Under HB 315, permanent substitutes who hold a bachelor’s degree could use their time in the classroom as an alternative to student teaching, which is a prerequisite to obtaining an initial teaching license.

Permanent substitute teachers would also be provided professional development training on skills to prepare them for a career in education, such as classroom management, lesson preparation and implementation, and identifying disabilities.

“A major concern of our members is the lack of trained and skilled substitutes available to provide desperately needed coverage for classes. Without effective coverage, class sizes balloon and educator effectiveness suffer. This bill addresses that issue by creating permanent positions for substitutes within the district and makes sure we have qualified people in the classroom at all times. Our educators are appreciative of this legislation and thank all of the legislators who have sponsored this bill,” said **DSEA President Stephanie Ingram.**

Under HB 315, schools that enroll 30 or more educators could hire one full-time substitute. Schools that enroll 55 or more educators could hire a second full-time substitute teacher. If a school meets only 65% of the 30 or 55 educators required, the district would receive additional funding to support a district-wide full-time substitute.

School districts could also choose to take a cash option instead and use the allocated funds to support substitute teaching or reducing class size.

“The proposed legislation sponsored by Representative Heffernan, Representative Williams and Senator Sturgeon is a critical next step in helping schools and districts to meet the ongoing demand for qualified staff. This bill will be instrumental in helping to stabilize and strengthen our substitute teaching pool. Among the many things we’ve learned through the course of the pandemic is the value of additional substitute teachers who can step up and fill in when educators are impacted by illness, leaves of absence or other circumstances. Being able to offer substitute teachers more stability and professional learning, while also helping schools to maintain consistent staffing, is a win-win—especially for our students,” said **Red Clay School District Superintendent Dorrell Green.**

“Any opportunity districts have to recruit and bring more substitutes into our buildings, is a good opportunity and worth exploring.  As teacher preparation program enrollment has dramatically declined over the past decade, our teacher candidate and substitute teacher pool has followed suit,” said **Jason Cameron**, Director of Human Resources and Public Information at Seaford School District and President of Delaware Association of School Personnel Administrators.

 “It is our hope this bill will help to attract, train and retain qualified individuals to serve as substitute teachers and provide them a runway to enter teacher preparation programs.”

HB 315 has been assigned to the House Education Committee.

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