

Education Minnesota

Senate GOP rejects provision to protect essential educators

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ST. PAUL, Minnesota. May 16, 2020 – The majority party in the Minnesota Senate chose to put the jobs of essential educators at risk on Saturday when the senators rejected language that would have protected the economic security of hourly school employees on the front line of the state’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the vote, leaders from two unions representing tens of thousands of hourly school workers expressed their frustration with the Senate’s vote to leave behind the school employees who care for students across Minnesota.

“Now is the time for Minnesotans to unite across our differences and make policy choices that benefit everyday people, not the richest 1 percent, not the largest corporations and not the billionaire owners of a shopping mall,” said Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota. “The majority party in the Senate decided to turn its back on the educators who are helping all Minnesotans through this crisis. These educators are doing all they can to make sure students are learning, fed and safe, even when their jobs put them at risk of infection.”

“It is shameful that Senate Republicans aren’t caring for hourly school employees in the same way that hourly school employees have cared for families during this pandemic. The bus drivers, para educators, food service workers and every other school employee in every corner of our state deserve better,” said Kelly Gibbons, executive director of SEIU Local 284, the union of over 10,000 hourly school workers. “Senate Republicans are talking about a bailout for the Mall of America, but they can’t make sure longtime school employees have some financial security? Minnesotans deserve leaders who make sure everyone – no matter our job title, ZIP code, race or gender – can provide for our families. As we head into an election this fall, we are going to make sure Minnesotans remember the elected officials who stood with working families and those who didn’t.”

The union leaders were referring to language originally included in HF4415, which would provide protections from layoffs for hourly school employees and educators who work in fee-based programs, such as some pre-school programs. Earlier this month, the House passed HF4415 with bipartisan support. On Saturday, instead of joining the House, the Senate removed the part of the House bill which would have supported these essential workers.

The hourly employees in schools, including education support professionals, are the most racially

diverse group of educators in any building. This group is also the lowest-paid group of educators.

“Education support professionals and other hourly workers are the glue that holds schools together. They are vital to the smooth operation of any school and they deserve better treatment than they received in the Senate tonight,” Specht said. “Sen. Carla Nelson of Rochester, who chairs the influential Education Finance and Policy Committee, and the rest of her caucus had a choice between helping these educators through a difficult time or spreading more anxiety and fear. They choose the latter. It will not be forgotten.”

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