



March 29th, 2023

The Honorable Sen. Jon Lundberg
Chair, Senate Education Committee

RE: Opposition to SB1141

As a coalition of teachers, parents, students, education leaders, librarians, and community members of diverse backgrounds from across all three Grand Divisions in the State of Tennessee, we are writing to express our opposition for SB1141, which will be considered by the Senate Education Committee today, March 29th.

This bill would allow any resident within a public school zone to file a complaint under Tennessee's Public Chapter 493, which restricts teachers from discussing 14 prohibited concepts. Under current enforcement rules created by the TN Department of Education (TDOE), only parents, students, or employees within a public school district or charter school can file complaints involving their school. Through this existing complaint process, there are already significant penalties in place for teachers and districts, including threatening educators' licenses and potential loss of state funds for a district.

Expanding the current complaints process to include *any resident* of the school district served by an LEA is unnecessary when there is already a process in place for Public Chapter 493. According to Section 1, Subsection (1)(d) of the bill, a resident can file a complaint if they have "actual or constructive knowledge" of the violation. However, this language is vague and creates an unclear open-ended complaint process. As a result, the likelihood for wrongful accusations to be submitted will inevitably increase because the bill implies that the person filing the complaint does not have to have direct contact with the teacher or school in question. With severe penalties, including the risk of losing licensure, allowing any resident to file complaints against schools is harmful overreach, creates unnecessary and burdensome administrative tasks, and fosters a culture of distrust toward our teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing teacher shortages, which is reflected in our ongoing struggles to attract and retain staff. According to the Tennessee State Board of Education, in the 2021-2022 school year, there were 1024 teacher vacancies throughout the state. Increasing mechanisms to penalize and intimidate teachers only serves to deepen challenging work environments by undermining Tennessean's confidence in their integrity and intentions. Moreover, this bill would increase the workload of school staff trying to investigate the heightened number of complaints by individuals who are not connected to their schools. With these additional burdens, there is the potential for the loss of critical funding for LEAs.

Overall, allowing any resident outside of our schools to submit violations against individual educators is clear legislative overreach and hinders the local control of our schools. This bill has a dangerous impact by threatening the well-being of our educators and consequently, their ability to help our students thrive. We stand in strong opposition to SB1141, and hope that you will make a choice to respect the integrity of Tennessee's educators and protect our school communities.

Sincerely,

The undersigned advocates of the [TN Coalition for Truth in Our Classrooms](#) network

cc: Members, Senate Education Committee



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