

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, March 15, 2021

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW02

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Thayn, Vice Chairman Crabtree, Senators Den Hartog, Woodward, Lent, Johnson, Cook, Ward-Engelking, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Thayn** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:01 p.m.

H 248 **Relating to Public School Funding; Adds to Existing Law to Provide That a School District or Public Charter School May Use Part of Its Salary-Based Apportionment to Pay for Its Employees to Be Covered by the State Employee Health Insurance Plan.** **Chairman Thayn** detailed information concerning **H 248** to the Committee. He said retirees will not be able to participate in **H 248**, a memorandum of understanding will be put in place, school districts will have to come up with money for reserves, and many school districts will therefore not be able to enter this plan the first year until these issues are addressed. **Representative Ron Furniss**, coauthor of **H 248**, then stood to answer any further questions the Committee had.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked if teachers and school staff in Idaho can currently sign up for the State insurance plan. **Representative Furniss** said yes, and referenced the Idaho Code described information in the handouts distributed during the previous meeting. **Senator Lent** asked if **H 248** would allow school districts to join the plan voluntarily and who would assume the risks. **Representative Furniss** said participating is voluntary, and the only risk to the school districts would be to pay the plan's monthly premium.

ROLL CALL VOTE: **Senator Ward-Engelking** moved to hold **H 248** in Committee. **Vice Chairman Crabtree** seconded the motion. **Chairman Thayn** called for a roll call vote. **Senators Johnson, Nelson, Ward-Engelking, Den Hartog, Woodward,** and **Vice Chairman Crabtree** voted aye. **Senators Lent, Cook,** and **Chairman Thayn** voted nay. The motion carried.

H 293 **Relating to Education; Adds to Existing Law to Provide For Reimbursement to Parents For Eligible Education Expenses Under Certain Circumstances.** **Representative Codi Galloway** outlined the bill for the Committee.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Cook** directed Representative Galloway to page 2, line 4, which states, "the State distribution fund will be reduced by the amount granted to a parent"; and asked when the money is removed from the district. **Representative Galloway** said when a school is closed, and the parent withdraws the student from enrollment, the school then lets the state board know about the withdrawal and a refund goes to the parent. At that point, the school's budget would be reduced by the amount awarded to the parent.

Senator Ward-Engelking asked if a student enrolled in an online school is then withdrawn from that school, are they eligible for a payment. **Representative Galloway** referenced page 1, line 38, which states a student attending an online school cannot be withdrawn from enrollment. **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked for clarification about days when schools are closed for reasons other than during a pandemic, such as a natural disaster. **Representative Galloway** referenced line 37 and said if a school district could not operate for any reason that would be covered.

Senator Nelson asked for clarification of page 1, line 17, which concerns eligible expenses and paying for private school students. **Representative Galloway** referenced a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that said a voucher program does not violate the establishment clause because the beneficiaries are families and not the institutions.

TESTIMONY: **Ann Ritter**, on behalf of the Idaho School Board Association; **Kathy Dawes**, of Moscow, Idaho; and **Andy Grover**, Executive Director, Idaho Association of School Administrators, testified in opposition to **H 293**. They said **H 293** was not necessary since many school boards around the State were already reopening schools using safety measures as directed by the health departments in their areas.

The League of Women Voters of Idaho submitted written testimony in opposition to **H 293**. (see Attachment 1). They argued that **H 293** would take local control away from districts that have had to manage student interests during the pandemic.

Lesa Coleman, of Boise, Idaho; **Blake Nelson**, student in Eagle, Idaho; **Tyler Hurst**, of Star, Idaho; **Jaime Thompson**, of Eagle, Idaho; and **Dean Anderson**, grandparent of an Idaho student, testified in support of **H 293**. They said that school boards who cannot open their doors would have a pathway to reopen if **H 293** passes. They also expressed concerns about the health and mental well-being of all Idaho students.

MOTION: **Senator Den Hartog** moved to send **H 293** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Cook** seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: **Chairman Thayn** asked for a roll call vote. **Senators Woodward, Lent, Johnson, Ward-Engelking, Nelson**, and **Vice Chairman Crabtree** voted nay. **Senators Den Hartog, Cook**, and **Chairman Thayn** voted aye. The motion failed.

H 249 **Relating to Education; Amends Existing Law to Provide for Permission to Participate in Instruction Regarding Human Sexuality.** **Senator Thayn** mentioned that **H 249** would not be heard today, and would be rescheduled for a future meeting.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Thayn** adjourned the meeting at 4:17 p.m.

Senator Thayn
Chair

Florence Lince
Secretary