



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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Initiative Attacking Teachers Won't Help Education

OAKLAND, CA -- California Federation of Teachers (CFT) President Mary Bergan released the following statement today regarding the initiative attacking teachers' job security. "It's disappointing that some believe the way to solve our education problems is to attack teachers," said Mary Bergan. "California faces a critical teacher shortage, and needs to recruit and retain more than 100,000 teachers in the next decade. This initiative undercuts that effort and threatens California's ability to meet students' needs and fulfill rapidly escalating state and federal education requirements."

"If the governor's goal is to help teaching and learning improve, lengthening the probationary period to five years won't accomplish it. It will have the opposite effect, because lack of job security will be one more hurdle in the way of young professionals working in difficult conditions," said Bergan. "Teachers earn job security after two years. Their tenure protects them against arbitrary and unreasonable firing. Lengthening teachers' probation period to five years from two will do nothing to attract, retain or improve teachers. Who takes a job where they must spend five years on probation? Teachers discuss controversial subjects, and need some protection against being fired based on a few complaints, or an arbitrary act by a principal."

"One of the biggest challenges public education faces is to retain good young teachers. Nearly half of all teachers leave the classroom within their first five years. When asked, they say they leave because of lack of support as a new teacher; poor working conditions; and an unreasonable expectation that they are to cure all of society's ills without being given the resources to do it. What is *not* needed to meet the challenge of teacher retention is a kick in the teeth. Tenure does not guarantee anyone a job for life. Neither teacher unions nor the collective bargaining agreements they negotiate with school districts prevent bad teachers from being fired. Administrative reluctance to pursue those teachers with the tools they have at their disposal is the culprit," said Bergan. "The state has cut funding for teacher recruitment, cut billions from classroom resources and heaped increased responsibilities on teachers, thousands of whom are already straining to teach subjects outside their expertise to help cover the gap in math, science and other subjects. This initiative makes a bad situation worse," Bergan said.

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As the statewide affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the CFT represents teachers and school employees in California from early childhood education through the university level.