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To:

**Senate K-16 Education Committee**

Re: Senate Bill 2253

Position: For

Date:

April 1, 2025

Honorable Chair Creighton and Members of the Senate K-16 Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 2253.

My name is Gladys Hernández, Director of Talent at City Education Partners in San Antonio. As a former classroom teacher who entered the profession through an alternative certification pathway with a practicum, I've experienced firsthand how strong preparation shapes teacher effectiveness—and how critical it is to get that preparation right.

At City Education Partners, we work to ensure every child attends a school that prepares them to thrive. We invest across the education ecosystem—partnering with school systems, preparation programs, funders, and workforce leaders to ensure students have access to great schools, excellent educators, and strong community advocates. Since 2015, we've helped recruit and train over 1,000 new teachers by expanding scalable, high-quality pathways—including paid residencies and Grow Your Own programs that boost certification rates, improve instruction, and reduce turnover. This year, we launched Teach San Antonio, a recruitment and retention platform developed with TEACH.org and local partners. In just months, it has attracted over 3,000 aspiring educators and is actively connecting them to quality programs across our region.

But interest alone isn't enough. We must build clear, supported, and financially accessible entry points into the profession—especially now, when 29% of new hires in Bexar County are uncertified and too many lack adequate preparation. We see the teacher pipeline as having two critical bookends:

Grow Your Own is the on-ramp—introducing future educators to the profession as early as high school through hands-on experience, dual-credit coursework, and mentorship. These programs make teaching a viable, aspirational pathway—especially for students from underresourced communities.

Schools like CAST Teach and Travis Early College High School are leading the way. At Travis ECHS, 44 students are on track to graduate with both a high school diploma and an Associate of Arts in Teaching, having already spent time in classrooms. These students are being prepared to return as certified teachers in the communities they call home. But the AAT is not the finish line—it's the baton pass. The next step must include a high-quality preparation program and a yearlong, paid residency to ensure candidates are truly ready on day one.

In San Antonio, these residencies pair aspiring teachers with expert mentors for a full school year. Candidates receive hands-on practice and real-time feedback; mentors grow in leadership and instruction. The result? First-year residents perform as well as peers in math and outperform them in reading—matching the impact of fifth-year teachers. And they stay. These programs build not just entry, but retention. We're already seeing momentum on the ground. University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and Region 20's Teacher Orientation and Preparation Program (TOPP), have all committed to embedding enhanced residency certificates into their programs to include a yearlong clinical placement, allowing aspiring teachers to learn side-by-side with a master teacher and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Despite the critical role teachers play, Texas currently provides almost no dedicated state funding for teacher preparation. That's where SB 2253 comes in. The bill would provide upfront stipends to aspiring teachers—removing the financial barriers that keep many from pursuing high-quality preparation. It prioritizes candidates entering high-need campuses and shortage areas like bilingual and special education. It's also fiscally smart. Texas loses an estimated \$2.2 billion annually to teacher turnover. SB 2253 supports cost-effective strategies—paid residencies and Grow Your Own programs—that not only fill classrooms with certified teachers but help them stay. Importantly, the bill ties funding to what matters: successful completion, practicum experience, certification, and retention. It supports a more structured and supported entry into teaching—and that's what keeps educators in classrooms. This bill is more than a funding mechanism. It's a statement about what Texas believes teaching should be. By investing in paid residencies, expanding Grow Your Own pathways, and strengthening mentorship and retention, SB 2253 builds a stronger teacher pipeline for the long haul.

As someone who has spent a career in education, I can say: belief in talent is not enough. We need bold policy that turns belief into action. SB 2253 is that action. It gives us the tools to start strong, support well, and build a profession worthy of the students we serve.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment. I urge your support and welcome the opportunity to continue this important conversation.

Sincerely,  
Gladys Hernández  
Director of Talent  
City Education Partners

