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STATE SENATOR

Sen. Vinehout Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 633
February 17, 2016
Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges

Thank you to Chairperson Harsdorf and members of the Senate committee for scheduling Senate Bill 633 for a hearing. This important legislation will provide our rural school district administrators a tool for attracting quality teachers.

Wisconsin's rural schools are the lifeblood of their communities. Dwindling resources are a significant challenge for rural districts to attract and retain quality teachers, especially when larger urban districts can offer significantly more attractive wages and benefits.

Our rural school districts have been doing more with less for years. Existing teachers cover more classes. In high-demand subject areas, they receive cross training. Districts ask current teachers to go back to school and obtain certification in different subjects. Local schools already share many teachers, guidance counselors and other staff. Teachers move between schools, between districts and even across state lines during the course of their workweek.

Senate Bill 633 provides a cash incentive our rural school districts could use to attract and retain teachers.

Similar to the Hospital Assessment Supplementary Loan Assistance Program (HASLAP), which provides up to \$50,000 in grants to rural physicians, the Rural Teacher Loan Forgiveness bill offers four scholarships for each rural district that has fewer than ten students per square mile in their district. Paid out over five years, this \$10,000 loan forgiveness grant is awarded by the district administration to the teachers of their choice and is administered by HEAB. Increments for payment are \$1,000 in the first year, \$2,000 in the second, third, and fourth years, and \$3,000 in the fifth and final year of eligibility.

Wisconsin's public schools are among the best in the nation. However, over the last few years, state budget cuts have left many of our schools struggling to meet their commitment to quality education. I urge you to support Senate Bill 633 so our rural schools can continue to provide a great education for all children and keep our rural communities strong.