

Testimony HB 629 Rep Koopman
February 16, 2005
House Education Committee

Mister Chairman, Members of the Committee, for the record my name is Bud Williams. I am the Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction. On behalf of the State Superintendent, I stand in opposition to this bill.

At the present time 99.6% of our teachers are fully certified that teach in the school's in Montana. And I believe that we can all agree that the quality of the teacher in the classroom is the most important part of providing a quality education. The quality of our teachers is why our students in Montana do so well on test scores.

I wish to make two important points about the bill!

First, the legislature is charged with providing a basic system of free quality public education. In the past, the legislature passed into law a system of teacher licensure. Allow me to quote Montana Code 20-4-101, "In order to establish a uniform system of quality education and to ensure the maintenance of professional standards a system of teacher and specialist certification shall be established and maintained under the provisions of this title..."

House Bill 629 seeks to extend the authority to license teachers to the local school district without regard to qualifications presently required by law. Specifically, House Bill 629 does not require teachers licensed by a school district to be 18 years of age or older, be of good moral or professional character or have completed a teacher education preparation program or have a bachelor's degree.

To allow every school district to determine the licensure of teachers, and then to require the state to issue a license certainly

does not maintain a uniform system of quality education as required by the Montana Constitution.

In an age of increasing accountability why would anyone seek lower professional standards and undermine a system of uniform licensure that requires completion of a program designed to train highly qualified teachers and further requires that a teacher is of good moral and professional character.

Second, No Child Left Behind requires that teachers in all public schools be "highly qualified". The Montana definition of highly qualified teachers submitted to the US Department of Education rests squarely on maintenance of the uniformity and high standards required through our licensure process. To allow anything less than is presently required by Montana statutes and administrative rules jeopardizes our compliance with federal statute and receipt of millions of dollars in assistance to our public schools.

On behalf of the State Superintendent, I urge you to not support this bill.