

MACTE Weekly Legislative Update, 3.13.15

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Bills Moving Quickly.

As the legislature moves ever closer to committee deadlines, bills are being introduced and discussed at a rapid pace. It has been a challenge to keep up with the ever-growing array of licensure-related bills being heard. The list of bills being followed has gotten too long to include in a one-page update, but the bill search function on the legislative website enables searches by such topics as teacher preparation and teacher licensure.

In the House This Week.

On Tuesday, 3.10, the House Education Innovation Policy Committee heard HF 645 which is designed to make it easier for those with valid out-of-state licenses and an offer of employment to be eligible for a Minnesota license. On behalf of MACTE, I expressed concerns about the potential of the bill to create a system that treats one of group of candidates differently from others. Of greatest concern is a repealer that would have the effect of treating candidates without an offer of employment differently from those who do have such an offer. It appears that the author supports at least fixing this piece of the bill, noting that it was not her intent to treat one group of out-of-state candidates differently from others. The bill will be heard next in House Education Finance.

On the same day, the House Higher Education Committee took up HF 1347, which is described as providing competitive grants of \$1 million per year for the next biennium for alternative preparation programs. From MACTE's perspective, the bill is problematic in several ways, including the fact that the criteria and descriptions articulated fit only one alternative program, Teach for America. I was one of several testifiers who urged the committee to revise the language of the bill to enable other innovative programs focused on the same goals to apply for funding and to improve its definitions. It was referred to House Education Innovation Policy. Its Senate companion, SF 1273, will be heard next Tuesday in the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee.

In the Senate This Week.

On Tuesday, 3.10, the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee took up SF 759, which would provide loan forgiveness for individuals preparing as teachers in shortage areas identified by the Commissioner of Education. MACTE President Kitty Foord testified in support of the bill. Also part of that hearing was an informational presentation by staff from the Bush Foundation.

On 3.11 and 3.12, the Senate Education Committee heard three major bills that included a number of licensure provisions. From MACTE's standpoint, the best bill is SF 559, which was amended significantly based on input from a variety of interested parties. Among other things, it makes more general the language about basic skills-type testing; provides for better

accommodations for test takers with disabilities; and provides some new forms of flexibility for teachers prepared outside Minnesota while generally maintaining high standards. SF 97 contains a single provision regarding licensure, and that is to specify that the temporary licenses awarded to candidates in alternative preparation programs are not provisional licenses. On behalf of MACTE, I testified against this language, noting that this would allow those candidates to continue to be licensed regardless of their performance in the program or completion of licensure requirements. The third bill taken up by the committee was HF 2, substituted for the companion bill initially introduced by Senator Pratt. In testifying against this bill, I expressed MACTE's preference for SF 559 and highlighted several particular concerns about the bill, notably proposed changes regarding non-licensed community experts (that they would only have to be reported to, not approved by, BOT) and language added stating that out-of-state candidates could be licensed based on teaching experience and test performance only.

Senate Committee Chair Chuck Wiger ended the Education Committee hearing on 3.12 by reporting that the committee's bill would be completed by Tuesday, 3.17 with a walk-through in committee on 3.18. We will be closely monitoring this bill, which will presumably be "conferenced" with HF 2.