

**Testimony of  
Gregory J. Baracy, Ed.D., Superintendent  
Wayne-Westland Community Schools  
House Education Committee  
April 20, 2011**

**Good Morning,**

**My name is Greg Baracy, and I am the Superintendent of the Wayne-Westland Community School District. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. 4465, and I not only support it, but urge you to report the bill out and ultimately pass it.**

**Some may say strikes by public employees are illegal, and we already have a strike bill; therefore, H.B. 4465 is unnecessary. However, nothing is further from the truth, and I would like to share our story.**

**In the fall of 2008, the Wayne-Westland School District was the target of the first illegal teacher strike, outside of the Detroit Public Schools, since the 1994 revision to Michigan's Public Employment Relations Act.**

**As the Board prepared for negotiations in 2008, they solicited bids for health insurance under PA 106 and found they could provide a comparable MESSA look-a-like for the teachers at a significant savings to the district without hurting the teacher membership. This seemed like a wise and financially prudent venue to pursue, since the RFP showed a \$900,000 savings for the teacher group alone, and the Board assumed they would be able to put this money into the classrooms.**

**When the WWEA/MEA knew the Board was serious about a new comparable health insurance proposal at a \$900,000 savings to the district, our local teacher negotiating team was mostly replaced by the MEA leadership from Lansing and MESSA representatives.**

**You may ask why was MESSA Insurance so important to the MEA? Wayne-Westland is one of the largest MESSA Groups in this region and MESSA is often referred to as a cash cow for the MEA.**

**Strike rumors had been circulating as early as January 2008. Leading up to the illegal strike, the WWEA/MEA employed every misleading and intimidating tactic imaginable to distort the real issues at the bargaining table.**

**On Monday, October 6, 2008, and without prior notice, the teachers refused to go to class and went on an illegal strike over health insurance.**

**This action, which started at 7:10 a.m., left 4,000 of our high school students stranded at our two respective high schools unsupervised, in harms way, and with our school campus in total chaos. Additionally, there were another 9,000 students getting ready to ride busses and walk to the middle and elementary schools, whose safety was threatened as well. In the midst of the media hype that the WWEA/MEA**

**had orchestrated, we had to try and load busses and reverse our three-tier bussing plan. The illegal strike jeopardized the safety of our students.**

**Parents were desperately trying to find child care, and some said they lost their jobs because they had to stay home for four days with their children.**

**A total of 13,000 students were abandoned and left without an education for 4 days. To make matters worse, this was just a few weeks before the MEAP test. The illegal strike lasted four days and after the MEA found a resident to file an injunction to end the strike, A WAYNE COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE ORDERED THE TEACHERS TO RETURN TO WORK WITH NO DISCIPLINE OR CONSEQUENCES FOR BREAKING THE LAW. This illegal strike disrupted the community and district for several months, and continues as a negative issue even today.**

**It is important to note that the illegal strikers were not financially penalized for breaking the law or their illegal actions. In fact, they benefited by being paid their per diem rate by the NEA/MEA in the amount of \$1,050,000 in wages. Yet, the cost to the district was an additional \$245,000 for other staff that were on the job, legal cost of \$250,000, administrative cost of \$96,000, and an estimated pupil count loss of \$796,000, for a total loss of revenue caused by the strike totaling \$1,387,000.**

**The only real issue behind the illegal strike was the MEA owned MESSA insurance and the WWEA/MEA's refusal to accept a comparable benefit package at a much lower rate to the district. Insurance coverage is another area requiring reform legislation NOW so we can redirect precious resources back into the classroom. This can be accomplished with little or no sacrifice to the individual employee.**

**To date, the cost savings that the Wayne-Westland School District could have realized, if the Board could have successfully negotiated a comparable health insurance package, would be approximately \$3.8 million.**

**This savings may have been enough to help the district get through one more year without going into deficit. This year our teachers' MESSA rates increased 17% on a \$10 million base, which is a \$1.7 million increase. Our comparable P.P.O. health insurance for administrators and support staff only increased 3%.**

**I will elaborate briefly on some of the unprofessional tactics the WWEA/MEA used during the strike and negotiations that followed. The Board, administration, families, children, and their employers were bullied and harassed. Even friends of the family were contacted by select union membership and their mission was to "get dirt" on the school official members and/or family so they could discredit them or embarrass them in the media.**

**Our garbage was "picked" and some of our property was vandalized. The NEA/MEA strategy directives and playbook was followed with perfection. With a self-proclaimed \$10 million dollar strike fund, the local Board of Education was no match for this state-wide political machine. When the robo-call went out to the State-wide MEA membership, they packed a Board Meeting held in the auditorium with over 1,500 members to intimidate the Board. MEA members came from as far away as Rockford and Dewitt to demonstrate and protest. Our students and parents were used as pawns in this illegal strike.**

**I could go on about the uneven playing field, but I think you get the picture. There must be a stronger language in the strike law to prevent a travesty like ours from happening again. These are adult issues, and they should be handled at the bargaining table. I implore you to strengthen the strike law and provide the necessary components to deter such disruptive behavior and level the playing field for Boards of Education.**

**I believe reforms to the strike law would help expedite negotiations and would be less disruptive to the educational process.**

**Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.**