**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Bipartisan Solution to Address the Montana Teacher Recruitment and**

**Retention Crisis Through Creation of School Health Insurance Trust**

Today, Representative Dave Bedey (Hamilton), Representative Llew Jones (Conrad), Senator Edie McClafferty (Butte), and Senator Dan Salomon (Ronan) introduced House Bill \_\_\_\_ to address the teacher recruitment and retention crisis through the creation of and investment in a public school health insurance trust. If adopted, this landmark legislation will deliver some of the most impactful solutions to address teacher recruitment and retention in Montana in nearly two decades.

Legislators were joined in the Montana State Capitol Rotunda by school board trustees, administrators, and staff from around the state and leaders of the public education advocacy organizations including Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) Executive Director Shelley Turner, Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC) Executive Director Doug Reisig, Montana Rural Education Association (MREA) Executive Director Dennis Parman, Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) Executive Director Lance Melton, and School Administrators of Montana (SAM) Executive Director Rob Watson.

“ “ QUOTE FROM SEN. SALOMON REGARDING SOLVING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

HB \_\_\_ is the result of collaboration over the past three legislative sessions to address the high costs of health insurance for public school employees, school districts, and local taxpayers. Exorbitant health insurance costs for employees and school districts are one of the leading contributing factors to the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

“ “ QUOTE FROM SEN. MCCLAFFERTY REGARDING YEARS OF WORK AND COLLABORATION

The bill specifies the qualifications for the creation of a qualifying school health insurance trust. A qualifying trust must be self-funded, cover a minimum of 12,000 employee lives, include the membership of at least 150 public school districts, and control administrative costs below 12% of total costs, among other qualifications.

“ “ QUOTE FROM REP BEDEY REGARDING IMPACT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Participation in a school health insurance trust is incentivized by the one-time appropriation of $60 million, of which $20 million may only be accessed if a trust is established and operating by June 30, 2025 and would be allocated on a per employee basis to all members of the trust. The remaining $40 million will be distributed to capitalize a reserve fund for the school health insurance trust.

“ “ QUOTE FROM REP. JONES REGARDING IMPORTANCE OF INCENTIVE

The school health insurance trust will give school district members greater control over the health insurance provided and how premiums are invested and ultimately spent. A school health insurance trust owned by Montana school districts and their employees will assist in lowering employee turnover by providing a sense of security and the peace of mind if an employee needs to access medical treatment.

HB \_\_\_\_\_ delivers solutions for Montana school employees, school districts, and local taxpayers.

Additional comments regarding HB \_\_\_\_:

**MASBO Executive Director Shelley Turner*:*** *MASBO is grateful to the bipartisan team of Legislators for their dedication in the development of HB \_\_\_. This bill addresses the growing problem Montana's public schools face in managing the rising costs of health insurance. Being able to provide stable and affordable coverage is essential to the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled workforce required to educate the students of Montana.*

**MQEC Executive Director Doug Reisig:** *HB \_\_\_\_ will create a school health insurance trust that can deliver real cost savings to both school districts and school employees when compared to traditional private health insurance companies. This will create an environment that will produce healthier, happier employees which will translate into lower school staff absenteeism, better school staff productivity, and school staff retention.*

**MREA Executive Director Dennis Parman:** *The educator recruitment crisis continues in rural Montana and helping manage healthcare costs is always a major element in our strategies. We see that bill as essential toward improving our abilities to effectively bring teachers to our schools.*

**MTSBA Executive Director Lance Melton:** *Legislators have engaged in a bipartisan collaboration to develop legislation that will improve recruitment and retention of teachers and other school employees with an efficient and accountable solution for taxpayers. HB \_\_\_ honors local control by providing a path for elected school boards and school leaders to work together to stabilize insurance rates and control costs. School leaders are excited at the prospect of creating a statewide school health trust and are grateful to sponsor Rep. Bedey, Rep. Jones, Senator Salomon, Senator McClafferty, and other legislators for developing a locally controlled solution to assist us in efforts to improve recruitment and retention in Montana's public schools.*

**SAM Executive Director Rob Watson:** *We know that having quality health coverage is an important issue for all school employees in our state. We believe that having affordable coverage is an important recruitment and retention issue for teachers and other school staff. In addition, rising costs of health insurance have a direct impact on the bottom line for school district budgets. Our members are hopeful that a statewide health insurance trust will lower costs for all and help to relieve the pressure felt by shortfalls in school budgets.*

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