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March 7, 2017

*By electronic mail*

The Honorable Jose Medina, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Higher Education  
1020 N Street, Room 173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### RE: AB 234 (Steinorth) – Support

Dear Assembly Member Medina:

Public Advocates supports AB 234 (Steinorth), the proposal to alleviate California's teacher shortage by enacting an urgency statute to restore funding to the Assumption Program of Loans Education (APLE) to its 2011-12 fiscal year level. This would allow teachers to earn up to \$11,000 for loan relief in return for their commitment of four consecutive years to service in a low-performing school.

Public Advocates is a civil rights legal organization that has served as a key voice for educational equity in landmark cases such as *Serrano v. Priest* and *Williams v. California*. In the *Williams* lawsuit, we complained that thousands of students were denied equal educational opportunity because their teachers were not fully credentialed, not properly assigned to the courses they were authorized to teach, or were not authorized to teach English Learners. As part of the settlement agreement, the state set a minimum standard in legislation to be applied statewide and this standard is now one of the state's priorities which districts must address in their Local Control Accountability Plans. Our commitment to "making rights real" has shaped our vision of building an educational system that prepares all students for college and careers and education policy that reflects the needs and voices of students and their families.

As recent research has made clear, California's education system is facing a severe teacher shortage, a trend characterized by steadily declining enrollment in educator preparation programs and growing turnover rates. This attrition has a negative impact on student achievement and disproportionately affects low-income and minority pupils. According to the Learning Policy Institute, underprepared teachers represented approximately 7% and 5% in high-income and low-minority schools, respectively, while they make up 22% and 25% of low-income and high-minority schools, respectively. Furthermore,

California's teacher shortage epidemic has resulted in a reduction of fully-qualified teachers in high-needs fields such as for English Learners and special education. Without action to improve teacher retention, California's neediest students will continue to be disadvantaged, undermining equitable access to quality education.

By alleviating debt and providing incentives for educators to teach in low-performing schools, AB 234 would mitigate the effects of our state's teacher shortage problems on disadvantaged communities. Given that compensation plays a significant role in influencing teacher retention rates, this bill is vital in restoring high-needs schools with qualified educators committed to providing all students with equitable opportunities for learning.

For these reasons, we strongly support AB 234. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about our position.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Assembly Committee on Higher Education  
Assembly Member Marc Steinorth  
Liz Guillen, Public Advocates