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**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education on Interim
Charge #1, Study and Make Recommendations Regarding More
Cost-Effective Funding of Financial Aid**

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On behalf of our 64,000 members, many of whom have benefited from the Educational Aide Exemption and the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment program, I would like to thank this committee for continuing to study successful financial aid programs and for working to align these popular and effective programs with state needs. These two programs have significantly helped to remove barriers to the teaching profession and have lured passionate professionals into the classroom.

Those interested in pursuing a teaching career are understandably daunted by the prospect of paying thousands of dollars toward certification for employment with relatively low compensation, especially given the marketability in other occupations of the knowledge and skills required for teaching. However, these programs help to put the dream of a teaching career within reach.

The Educational Aide Exemption program has paved the way for many dedicated and talented educational aides to attend college and become teachers ready to serve long and productive careers in the classroom. The State Board of Educator Certification has noted that there is an exceptionally high teacher-retention rate for those students who complete the program. This is probably because teacher aides already have a passion to teach children and are familiar with the classroom environment.

We are pleased to see that the Higher Education Coordinating Board excluded both the Educational Aide Exemption and Teach for Texas Loan Repayment from the agency's proposed 5-percent budget reductions. We strongly believe that the state has ample reason to consider a significant increase in funding for these two programs.