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Reps. Shelton, Hong: Shallenge process and provisions in Republican literacy bill

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MADISON – In today's Floor Session, Representatives took up Assembly Bill 321, relating to: changes to our state's reading instruction, an early literacy assessment and intervention program, and other provisions relating to child literacy. Merely hours before the legislation's final reading on the Assembly Floor, the bill's author offered an amendment to address a few but not all concerns raised by elected officials, agencies, public testimonies, and constituents across the state.

On the bill's passage, Rep Shelton (D-Green Bay) offered the following statement:

"More must be done to support our youngest readers and improve literacy proficiency scores in Wisconsin. Too many of our students are struggling and teachers need more support to meet growing demands both in and out of the classroom. It was a positive step forward to hear legislators from both sides of the aisle recognize that our kids, teachers, parents, and communities deserve better.

"However, there are provisions of AB 321 that present too many unanswered questions, implementation challenges, and concerns around funding and mandates. And, with the speed at which this bill passed through the legislature, we, along with our partners, did not have adequate time to constructively engage with stakeholders and educators. There are pieces in this bill that I find tremendous value in. But ultimately, our kids need *more*. I voted no on AB 321 today to give our students – and our state – another chance to do this the right way."

Representative Hong (D-Madison) released the following statement:

“There are underlying issues that inform the literacy discussion in Wisconsin, yet these issues — addressing childhood poverty, bridging our opportunity gaps, and remedying the chronic underfunding of Wisconsin public schools — are largely absent from AB 321 and from the work being done in this legislative body.

Instead, Republicans have offered a half-baked bill that burdens our schools further by legislating mandates and bans that take away tools from our educators instead of giving them the resources they need.

It is no secret that Wisconsin school districts have faced fiscal disaster because of the attacks they have sustained by Republicans who seek to undermine the institution of public education and whose agenda revolves around turning education into big business. If we are serious about teaching our kids to read, we need to offer a more serious solution.

AB 321 only offers a topical fix in the form of one time funding. This is neither long-term nor adequate. We can and must do better.”