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**Senator Victor Torres, Jr. and Representative Harris File
Legislation to Combat Florida's Teacher Shortage**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - With a record number of public school staff vacancies, **State Senator Victor Torres, Jr. (D- Kissimmee)** and **State Representative Rita Harris (D - Orlando)** have filed **Senate Bill 1482** and **House Bill 1097**, which would expand eligibility for Florida's Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP).

If passed, **SB 1482/ HB 1097** would eliminate the current time restraints on retirees in DROP, a retirement plan offered to eligible Florida teachers who are members of the Florida Retirement System. Currently, retirees who participated in DROP must wait at least six calendar months before becoming eligible to be re-employed. This bill would grant teachers, school nurses, administrators, and bus drivers the opportunity to opt for re-employment quicker without affecting their retirement benefits.

"Florida has a shortage of qualified school teachers, bus drivers and other personnel which is why I support making these changes to allow former retirees who have years of experience to return to the classroom sooner and improve educational opportunities for students in our public schools," said **Senator Torres**.

According to the [Florida Department of Education](#), there are nearly 9,000 vacancies among public school teachers and support staff. Reportedly the worst teacher shortage in history, many vacancies were created during the COVID-19 pandemic and have since been exacerbated. The bill sponsors credit the increase in staffing shortages to a lack of competitive pay and increased attacks on public schools.

"For several years, public schools have been experiencing a shortage of teachers, school nurses, bus drivers, and other support staff that are vital to the education of Florida's children. This bill will allow previously retired teachers to come back to work, if they feel inclined, before their waiting period is over. This will relieve the stress that many schools are facing as they try to meet the needs of our growing population. I am proud to file a bill that will help students and support our public schools," said **Representative Harris**.

If passed, the expansions to Florida's Deferred Retirement Option Program would take

effect on July 1st, 2024. Florida's legislative session is set to begin tomorrow, January 9th, 2024.

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