

Senate Committee on Education

April 10, 2024

My name is Morgan Daybell and I am the President of the Vermont Association of School Business Officials and the Business Manager for Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.630. I will say from the outset that I have not discussed this bill with my boards, or my VASBO colleagues, and so these opinions are my own.

I support the goals of the proposed legislation, namely finding ways to increase financial efficiency and programmatic delivery in a state that has few students and many schools. H.630 may offer those opportunities for some districts in Vermont, but it does that despite the governance structure in Vermont. This bill does not address those underlying governance issues, and I hope that the passage of H.630 does not become a means to avoid the necessary, albeit challenging, discussions on these matters.

Over the past several years, the Alternative Programs we had relied on have closed or stopped taking the neediest of our students. We built an in-district program that has been successful both in reducing the amount of our extraordinary special education costs, and providing for easier transitions for students between our traditional schools and these out of school placements. As soon as those doors opened, we had neighboring districts reaching out to see if we could take on their students, as they are having the same trouble with their out of district placements. Our program remains open only to our Supervisory Union, in part because of the barriers to working collaboratively.

I offer three recommendations to the committee on the bill as currently drafted:

1. Clarify what happens if there are more than seven proposed BOCES. Are the first seven the ones allowed to go forward? Will the Agency of Education, or the Legislature choose which BOCES are allowed to form? Who develops the review criteria?
2. Push out the deadlines in Section 3. We are working through a historic number of budget defeats, our first year of Act 127, and are still transitioning under Act 173. Individual boards will need time to explore their interest, and then forming boards will need time to work through a process reminiscent of Act 46. Extending the deadline a year or two may allow for more deliberative work, and stronger structures.
3. Give Supervisory Unions the ability to own property and to borrow money, as is proposed for BOCES. In setting up our alternative program, we did not have the option to purchase and own a building available to us, or to borrow money for the fit up. We found a way to work around that restriction, but that path was not chosen because it was more efficient, but rather because it was the only path available.

Thank you for your time.