

## Secretary of Education Confirmation Hearing: Letters from Constituents

Dear Education Committee Senators,

I am reading with extreme concern about Governor Scott's nominee for the Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders. It is completely astonishing that anyone without classroom teaching experience or public school administrative experience would be nominated for this position. Zoie Saunders does, however, have a history of working for a for-profit charter schools *management company*. I believe Gov. Scott is making his priorities very clear with this nomination: to weaken our public education system in this state.

As the wife of a teacher, and someone who cares intensely about the democratic institutions in this state and this country, I am urging you to please reject this nomination.

With regards,  
Julia Ostrov  
Montpelier, VT

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Dear Senators,

Not only have I done my research regarding the Governor's nominee for VT Secretary of Education, Ms Zoie Saunders, but I have been closely monitoring national trends on the topic of public education funding. There is, as I expect you appreciate, considerable action these days around privatization of schools, school voucher issues, religious schools' tuition being subsidized by tax-payer dollars, and the establishment of charter schools. There is no doubt that this is a difficult time for our public schools, and for the children and families our schools serve.

Please look closely at Ms Saunders' credentials and her lack of experience in the public school/education arena. Take note of her support of charter schools. Take note of her lack of teaching experience. Take note of her lack of actual public school administration experience.

I am convinced that Ms Saunders is NOT the best person for the job. I know Vermont can do better. Mine is not a politically-based criticism. In fact, I am usually a supporter of our Governor, despite my life-long affiliation with the Democratic Party. In this instance, however, the Governor has not made the best possible choice to serve our State as Secretary of Education. Please decline to confirm Ms Saunders to the position. Surely we can and must do better. Thank you for your service. Sincerely,

Gene White Jr  
Essex Jct, VT

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Dear Morgan,

I would like to be as direct as possible in sharing my professional opinion that Zoie Saunders would be a terrible choice for Vermont's lead learner in the state of Vermont.

I find it quite illogical that her background and experience as someone who has been a promoter of for-profit organizations and the City of Fort Lauderdale can serve the educational needs of our children and families here in Vermont.

Her experience boasts experience in development and strategy for business organizations, not as an educational leader in public schools. In most instances, Ms. Saunders' focus has been on improving the bottom line and attempting to bolster the reputation of these organizations, not necessarily to improve the academic, social, and emotional lives of children.

Schools are being expected to do more than has ever been asked with less and less support from tax payers and lawmakers. As a consultant in a non-profit organization, I am watching with a broken heart as seasoned, veteran teachers as well as bright, resilient new ones are burning out at an alarming rate and giving up this profession not for lack of skill or motivation, but for lack of capacity which is only exacerbated by mental health crises and a changing society.

It is worrisome that Ms. Saunders **does not have any public school experience**, neither as an educator in classrooms nor as an instructional leader at the school, district, or state levels.

Ms. Saunders' entire educational experience is in the Florida educational context where the grading system is still A-F (Vermont abandoned this system in 2013 with Act 77 adopting proficiency based assessment); where the math graduation requirements for high school is algebra and another math course (most Vermont students take algebra in eighth grade); where personalized learning plans (PLPs), individual education plans (IEPs), and 504 plans are nearly nonexistent (Vermont requires PLPs for all students in grades 7-12 and other plans for those who are identified as having learning or physical challenges); and where the average teacher salary was the lowest in the United States at \$50,000 in 2021-2022 (Vermont was \$63,500 that same academic year).

Vermont deserves better. We have seen Governor Scott delay the appointment of a new Secretary of Education for entire year, an opaque search for a new secretary, and now the selection of Zoie Saunders who is just not a good fit for Vermont. I urge you and your colleagues in the Senate to fully investigate Ms. Saunders' credentials and ask: Is she the best person to lead Vermont public schools?

I would be happy to talk further as someone who has held every position in schools from tutor, support staff, teacher, assistant principal, principal and now consultant and coach. It is my professional opinion that Ms Saunders could do further harm to an already fragile and stressed education system in our state.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jessica Villeneuve

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Dear Senator:

We urge you NOT to approve Zoie Saunders as Secretary of Education.

She does not have the experience to deal with the challenges of public education.

We need someone experienced and dedicated to public education, not Zoie Saunders.

Respectfully,  
Maria Barrett  
Frederick Barrett  
Richmond, Vermont

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As a retired Vermont Educator, I am very concerned about the nominee for Secretary of Education. Our public schools are vital to our democracy which is in a fragile state right now. The nominee, Zoie Saunders, has zero experience as a teacher, principal or superintendent in the public school system. Her background working for Charter Schools USA does not inspire confidence as a leader in our Vermont school system. Please take these concerns seriously.

Sincerely,  
Jamie O'Hare  
Resident of East Montpelier

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Hi Andrew,

I'm writing to express my deep concern about the governor's appointment to Sec of Education. At first I was merely curious about her background, esp when I heard that she's worked with charter schools. My curiosity grew when the governor's response to these concerns turned downright defensive.

Knowing the unique crisis that we face here in Vermont with our beloved and beleaguered schools and school system, it seems that this position would require a person with deep knowledge of our particular crisis. Hiring someone who is simply 'a good listener' and has a very shallow well of experience in public schools does NOT instill confidence. This opinion is not based upon the mere fact that she is an outsider. This is a judgment based on the fact that her credentials are not noteworthy, her experience in public school systems is superficial, and she has NO historical foundation upon which to base her work here in Vermont.

But don't take it from me. Take it from the many, many public school professionals and volunteers, like the Vt School Boards Association. I trust the people who have been doing the work already, and who know what kind of leader is actually needed now.

Many thanks for your time, and for your hard work each session.

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Jane Knight, she/her  
Children's Buyer  
Bear Pond Books, Montpelier VT

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Dear Education Committee Senators,

I am writing due to my grave concerns about the Governor's nominee for Education Secretary. I have read the available materials—her resume posted by the governor, the article in Seven Days, as well as official statements both supporting her and questioning her qualifications. She seems bright and affable, but not ideally qualified to run the Vermont Dept of Education. I agree with the concerns raised about her lack of demonstrated commitment to public schools. I am also very concerned about dedication to equity, and Ms. Saunders extensive work with private companies/ charter schools is not consistent with that value.

I am a mental health counselor who specializes in working with adolescents. I also have one child currently in Montpelier High School and one who recently graduated. I want to see a nominee for this position who is clearly experienced in and dedicated to public schools. Our schools are the backbone of our communities and deserve and require true respect and support. This governor has done some good things for the State of VT, but I have not been impressed with his vision for or support of schools. And this seems like another example.

Thank you for your attention.

Kelly McCracken  
Montpelier, VT

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Dear Senator Champion:

I'm writing to you in your position as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education.

I have taught and worked with students for over 25 years on the middle & high school levels as well as in higher education.

Here in Vermont I earned my Master of Fine Arts degree from Goddard College and I have taught at Bennington & Marlboro Colleges, & Vermont Governor's Institute on the Arts.

Additionally I have been a guest artist at the former Johnson State College/Northern Vermont University. Outside of Vermont I have been a professor at University of Colorado Boulder, Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, and Franklin Pierce University. I have worked in high

schools such as Lower Merion, Conestoga, & Harrington High Schools, as well as Germantown Academy & Abington Friends School in Pennsylvania, and Concord & Milton Academies in Massachusetts. Currently I am a consultant to Teachers College, Columbia University & I was recently appointed as one of the Town Of Concord representatives to the Kingdom East School District Board, though I am not representing any of those current positions I hold with my writing to you.

My lifelong background in education and being deeply student centered gives me serious pause over Governor Phil Scott's appointment of Ms. Zoie Watson Saunders, M.Ed - to be the next Secretary of Education. Indeed I have major reservations **about her qualifications to lead the Vermont Agency of Education for the following reasons:**

1.) Ms. Saunders does not possess a terminal degree in education or otherwise- she has a 30 credit masters degree from Vanderbilt University, and it is not directly related to teaching or working with students. **This degree would not allow her to teach on the college level - more importantly, it would not allow her to teach on the elementary or secondary levels in public schools - without licensure.**

The most recent Vermont Secretaries of Education - Rebecca Holcombe, Daniel French, Heather Bouchey, have all possessed a doctoral degree. There are major differences between an M.Ed such as Ms. Saunders holds and the Ed.D & Ph.D degrees. I deeply hold that one's own education paired with real teaching and school administration experience is paramount in such a position as Secretary of Education. Ms. Saunders does not possess that knowledge or experience based on her credentials and resume that Governor Scott has presented.

2.) Ms. Saunders is not licensed to teach, and to the best of my knowledge has never been a teacher nor worked in the classroom - public or private. Nor has she been a principal of a school or superintendent of a school district. Additionally I see no evidence that she has served on a school board, nor **has she worked directly with students and families. To**

me, all of this disqualifies Ms. Saunders from the Vermont Secretary of Education position.

3.) Ms. Saunders extensive work with/for charter schools is concerning - as a core belief I have personally encountered for charter schools nationwide is that they feel they are entitled to public funds, but insist they have no accountability to the tax payer and voter - as they weaken public education. There are many outstanding questions about her work with charter schools for sure.

4.) It appears Governor Scott & his team paid no attention to the surveys done by the Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, and the Vermont Principals Association which clearly voiced the needs Vermont educators had for a new Secretary of Education - <https://link.vtvsba.org/SOEResponses.pdf> . His ignoring this input is deeply disappointing and concerning. In so many ways I believe Governor Scott has done a great job for Vermont, and Vermonters through some very difficult times during his terms- but with this appointment of Ms. Saunders and his failure to fill the secretary position for so long - **he has failed Vermont's students and citizens spectacularly.**

5.) As Vermonters, we are facing hard upcoming conversations and decisions concerning schools, schools spending & property taxes, and school buildings. These are issues the local schools boards and administrators will be on the front line for. It would stand to reason that someone who actually lives and works in Vermont should be at the helm of the Agency of Education for these decisions we will have to wrestle with. I can point to the disastrous appointment of Parwinder Grewal from Texas to the presidency of the newly emerging Vermont State University as an example of a non- Vermonter making horrible education decisions for Vermonters. We all saw how that played out, and the cost Vermont paid. It just makes no sense to me what-so-ever, and should serve as a lesson for you, Governor Scott and the Vermont Senate when considering the appointment of Ms. Saunders. We need someone who knows how diverse, unique, and complex Vermont & Vermonters are to lead the Agency of Education. **That Ms. Saunders is from Florida currently is of no importance what-so-ever. That she is not from, living, or ever lived in Vermont paired**

with that she is not a teacher is of utmost importance.

**You** wouldn't want someone who, say, lives in Chicago, being the state representative/senator for Bennington would you Mr. Champion?

With these concerns in mind, I am urging you and your fellow senators to do what's best for Vermont's children & families, education system, & towns by not confirming Zoie Watson Saunders to the position of Vermont Secretary of Education. **Send Governor Scott back to the drawing board to select a qualified Vermonter to this crucial position.**

Sincerely,

Mark O'Maley  
Concord, VT 05824

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Dear Senators,

Please vote no on Governor Scott's nominee for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders. We need someone leading the Agency of Education with deep experience in public schools.

Thank you,  
Jesse Williams  
Moretown

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Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

I write to register my opposition to the appointment of nominee Zoie Saunders.

My objections are twofold.

First, the nominee lacks the most basic of credentials--that of public school teaching experience. I don't know if there is any precedent for appointing an education secretary who has never been a teacher, a principal, or a superintendent in a public school system, but it is certainly not the norm, and for good reason. As a long-ago employee of the Vermont Department of Education, I have no doubt that a large portion of the state's public school employees will be very very skeptical of a leader who has never worked in public schools, and who can blame them?

Second, the nominee's long affiliation with for-profit charter schools raises questions about the nominee's priorities and education values. What are Vermont teachers and administrators to think of a secretary whose career has been devoted to advancing for-profit charter schools? How can they not be utterly demoralized by this appointment? How can Vermonters generally

have confidence that the state's schools are in good hands when the secretary's track record is all about dismantling public schools?

The public school system is an essential player in this democratic country. I believe we should do all we can to strengthen public schools and support public school employees. I don't see any evidence that this nominee can do that.

Katherine Clark  
East Montpelier

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As a public educator and parent of a K-12 student in Vermont, I am writing to urge you NOT to approve Zoie Saunders as the VT Secretary of Education. We need a secretary that understands the value of public education and will fight for students, teachers, and staff. That person is NOT Zoie Saunders. Ms. Saunders has been hand-picked by Phil Scott to promote an education agenda that moves more public funds into private schools. This is the last thing we need. A "no" vote for Ms. Saunders is a "yes" vote for public education.

Thank You,

Sarah Adelman  
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Sarah Adelman (she/her)  
Library Media Specialist  
Camels Hump Middle School

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Dear Senate Committee on Education,

We are asking your committee and the Senate to not approve this appointment of Zoie Saunders to the Secretary of Education.

We do not question her appointment because she is from Florida, though Vermont candidates have incredibly better understanding and knowledge of our unique situation.

We question her appointment because she has no public education experience whatsoever.

We question her appointment because her primary professional experience is in a for-profit charter management organization (CMO).



We question the lack of transparency in state leadership - Mrs. Saunders is not taking questions from the public and very limited questions from the press. There is no transparency or good-faith response by the Governor to valid concerns being raised.

The Secretary of Education has immense authority in public education in the state. We're in a crisis of education - school budgets are failing and being decimated across the state, taxpayers are losing faith in the system. Clearly there is much work to be done and we're all looking for strong leadership at the state level. This is not the strong leadership we need.

*Thank you for protecting Vermont public education,  
Toni Morgan,  
Essex Junction*

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I am a retired Educator and Guidance Counselor. I am writing to you to ask you to NOT SUPPORT the Governor's pick for Education Secretary. For someone who has NO PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCES to even be considered MAKES NO SENSE.

Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,  
Janice SolekTefft  
Underhill

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Dear Ed Committee,  
Please DO not approve the appointment of Zoie Saunders to the Secretary of Education. She is not qualified, not because she is from Florida but because she has no public education experience whatsoever. I am against her appointment because her primary professional experience is in a for-profit charter management organization (CMO). I question the lack of transparency in state leadership - Mrs. Saunders is not taking questions from the public and very limited questions from the press. The press is not being allowed to attend her state-wide "listening tour."

Public education is too important to Vermonters. We deserve better.  
Thank you,  
Liz Subin  
Essex, Vermont

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Dear Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my extreme concern and dismay at the proposed appointment of Zoie Saunders as Vermont Secretary of Education.

As a retired teacher of 30 years I am truly horrified that Ms. Saunders has never taught, been a principal or superintendent. I cannot understand how she is even being considered for this very

important role. Vermont schools are suffering terribly right now. My former colleagues are exhausted from working with limited staff and dealing with difficult behaviors. Schools are also facing severe budget cuts.

Vermont needs a Secretary of Education who can hit the ground running.

Someone who knows Vermont and its schools....or at least has the experience of actually working inside schools.

From what I understand, three important organizations, Vt.

Superintendents Association, Vermont School Boards Association and the Vermont Principals Association have expressed concerns about Ms.

Saunders qualifications and I don't understand why Governor Scott and the powers that be are not listening to that feedback. If we don't support our teachers and our schools I shudder to think about what will happen to our amazing Vermont schools and the people who work so hard to keep them running as smoothly as they can under difficult circumstances.

Please consider voting no to Zoie Saunders appointment as Secretary of Education for Vermont.

Sincerely,

Wendy Scott

Enosburg Falls, VT

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Please do not endorse Ms. Saunders! There are many much more qualified than she!

Polly Larkin

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Good morning. I am a resident of Hinesburg. I have long supported schools as the mother of three and grandmother of five. I volunteer in public schools. I dare say I have more experience than Governor Scott nominee. I do not believe that she has the background to help us out of our unique issues. I do not support charter schools. Please vote no on the secretary of education nominee.

Respectfully,

Kathleen Bruce RN, BSN, BA  
Hinesburg, Vermont 05461 USA

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Good morning. I'm writing to strongly urge you to do what's best for Vermont's children and families, education system, and towns by not confirming Zoie Watson Saunders to the position of Vermont Secretary of Education. Please send Gov. Scott back to the drawing board to select a qualified Vermonter, if possible, to this crucial position at this critical time in Vermont's prek-12 education system. As a born and bred Vermonter having spent my entire 40-year educational

career in the state as a classroom teacher, special educator, school administrator and school board member, I know well what and who we need for Education Secretary and it is not Zoie Watson Saunders! Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sandra

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Dear Senate Committee on Education:

The top position in Vermont's education system has never been a more complex role. Our education funding system is not serving the community, tax dollars are shifting to private schools, enrollment is slipping, and test scores are stagnant. While looking outside the state is understandable given our limited labor pool and perhaps an appetite for fresh perspectives, the appointment of Zoie Saunders falls quite short of what is needed by our students, teachers, district administrators, and taxpayers now and in the future.

I am a citizen of Essex Junction and a parent of two students who attended their K-12 years in the Essex Junction schools. I am writing you as a constituent. I am also writing you as a constituent with some background in K12 public education having worked for the past 6 years in the Ed Tech industry. My work involves following education trends, funding streams, and Federal and state policy initiatives.

It is evident to me that the appointment of Zoie Saunders is part of a growing trend to erode public education from the inside out and one about which we cannot afford to be naive.

Vermont is a unique state. Our small size can make innovation easier to scale but it can also make the impact of errors hit deeper and faster. Ms Saunders is not the innovator or the experiment Vermont can afford to take on right at this time.

Please do not let approve Zoie Saunders for Secretary of Education.

Respectfully,  
Julie Miller-Johnson

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Dear all,

First, I'd like to state that I am not someone averse to seeing our public school system adapt, nor am I averse to independent schools. In fact, I've worked in an independent school for 17 years. However, I am deeply dismayed by this nominee, who seems to have no experience in a public school of any kind. Her administrative experience before she entered her government position was with a for-profit charter school, the kind of organization which, to me, is inherently problematic since its purpose is to make money for someone rather than re-invest that money in students. Her experience in her government position was in a county that is fundamentally different from our mostly rural state. There is no doubt that our education system faces the challenges of those in many rural states--small towns trying to provide for small student populations and yet travel times and road conditions make consolidation challenging. This situation will need an education secretary who actually understands rural public schools in addition to larger suburban and urban public schools. As somebody who has been on hiring committees, I'm perplexed why Ms. Saunders even made the final cut for this position since she doesn't seem to have the requisite experience or skills to help our towns and our small cities face the challenges they face.

I urge you not to confirm this nomination, and to seek someone better suited to the task.

Laura McCaffrey  
Laura Williams McCaffrey  
she/her/hers  
Writer | Teacher | Editor

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Dear Senator Hashim,

I'm writing to express my concern over Governor Scott's appointment of Zoie Saunders as Education Secretary in Vermont. I urge you NOT to support this appointment. I have researched her experience and background, and believe that it would be an understatement to say that she is woefully unprepared to lead our state's Agency of Education - lacking experience in critical aspects of schools (from teaching through administration), and limited knowledge of public schools. I would also argue that the public school experience she has, working in Broward County FL for a short time, has little application to the school districts in VT.

I continue to be amazed that an individual with no teaching or school leadership experience, an individual who could not be licensed to serve as a Superintendent in VT, has been appointed to lead the agency that oversees schools, teachers, and school leaders at all levels statewide. She would start her tenure with little to no "street credibility" at a time when credibility is necessary.

I am qualified to make this assessment.

I served as a VT school administrator for 18 years (Orange SW Supervisory Union), and teacher before that, and since leaving the VT school system in 2002. During my tenure as a school administrator, I was president of the Vermont Principals Association, Chairman of the New England Commission of Secondary Schools (a commission of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges).

In 2002 I co-founded Teaching Learning Solutions, a company serving school districts throughout the United States. Our clients include Los Angeles Unified School District, School District of Philadelphia, Baltimore City School District, and numerous other districts nationally. We have previously supported the work of various Departments of Education for the states of Hawaii, New York, Connecticut, Georgia, and have supported numerous county school districts in MD and Florida - in Florida we currently work with Okaloosa & Volusia counties, and have supported numerous other counties as well. TLS has participated as developers and researchers in numerous national studies on teacher quality, working as partners with Educational Testing Service in Princeton, NJ.

I question the advice Gov Scott received if he was told that efforts in Florida Schools serve as an example of how we might address challenges we face in VT schools. FL per pupil spending ranks 41 out of 50 states (<https://teaching-certification.com/teaching/education-spending-by-state/>). They have cut and slashed spending to the point that students lack materials and qualified

teachers. Meanwhile, support and spending has been continually diverted from public schools to charter schools in FL, allowing charter schools to function with reduced public oversight. I have witnessed firsthand many demoralized teachers in FL reacting to the continual onslaught and lack of support for education.

While I agree that VT has to solve the challenge of rising costs in education, I can't imagine what experience or knowledge Zoie Saunders would contribute to solving this challenge. I fear that the time needed for her to simply understand the VT educational system and governance would be time wasted in finding any meaningful solutions or strategies to move our state education agency, and schools forward. That, along with her lack of any knowledge of teaching, assessment, and school leadership, frightens me!

I strongly request that you do not support this appointment!

Best,  
Albert "Duffy" Miller, Ed.D.

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It is essential for any candidate to have classroom and administrative experience in public schools, preferably in Vermont. It is critically important that the secretary of education be first and foremost a supporter of the public school system. Ms. Saunders, as I understand it, attended private schools herself and has never taught in a public school classroom. Her longest professional affiliation has been in the promotion of for-profit charter schools. Ms. Saunders may have laudable abilities, but the only reason such a candidate would be confirmed would be to put a stamp of approval on the gradual dismantlement of the state's public school system. I implore the committee not to let that happen.

Katherine Clark  
East Montpelier

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Hello Vermont Representatives,

While I many times agree with Governor Scott, his pick for Education Secretary is a mistake! I am a taxpayer in the Northeast Kingdom, a mother to a Kindergartener, and a school librarian. When it comes to educational policy, Governor Scott has not had the best interest of students in mind, especially students from small rural communities. He has not hid his desire to close the smaller schools in an effort to save money. This would be detrimental to these small towns, where their elementary schools do so much more than just educate children. How will these small rural communities attract new residents if they no longer have a local option to educate their children? Governor Scott should be directing his efforts towards making housing affordable and attracting new residents to Vermont, rather than further dismantling our public school system.

Scott's choice for Education Secretary speaks volumes about his true educational agenda. His choice, Zoie Saunders, has NO public school experience as a teacher and her background in "repurposing" schools with declining enrollment are huge red flags. As is her association with for-profit charter schools. This is not the type of educational leadership that we need in Vermont. We need someone who values public schools and what they have to offer students in both big towns and small, rural communities. We do not need Florida's version of Betsy DeVos to be our Education Secretary. We need someone who understands Vermont's current needs, which requires more than looking at budgets and cutting important community institutions.

Please block the nomination of Zoie Saunders, and tell Governor Scott to do better!

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Sincerely,

Christine Owens

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Dear Committee Members,

I am currently teaching at Rumney Memorial School in Middlesex and have been a Vermont public educator for over 20 years. I staunchly support Public Schools!

A strong public school system is the hallmark of an equitable and inclusive society, where all children, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, their academic needs, their race, gender or ethnicity, have equal access to rigorous, high-standards educational opportunities.

I have serious concerns with a Secretary of Education who values and supports eliminating public schools over private, for-profit charter schools.

I urge you to not recommend Governor Scott's appointee of Zoie Saunders to the full Senate.

Respectfully,  
Diana Costello

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Senators on the Education Committee

I'm reaching out to express my extreme concerns about Governor Scott's selection of Zoie Saunders as Vermont's next Secretary of Education. From what I've read about her previous experience, I'm surprised the Vermont State Board of Education advanced her as a candidate. Regardless of her political leanings, her experience leaves her completely unqualified for this role.

I taught in the Vermont public schools for 25 years and both of my children are products of the system. There are many challenges facing the public school system but ultimately, it is worth solving them. They provide so many services to students and in many small towns they are the heart of the community.

Vermont needs a Secretary of Education with experience supporting this essential system and Zoie Saunders is not that person. I urge the Education Committee not to make a recommendation that the full Senate confirm her for this position.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Liz Greenberg

Huntington, Vermont

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Hello Senators,

I am writing as a teacher and a parent of two young Vermont students in Chittenden County. I love teaching, living, and raising my daughters in our “brave little state”. We are small but we have a lot of heart. And I believe we all want what is best for our children, our future leaders. So please do everything in your power to resist the appointment of Zoie Saunders as Secretary of Education. She has NO teaching experience. How can we expect her to be the head of education? As if that was not bad enough, much of her experience was spent working for a company that siphoned public education dollars into the pockets of shareholders. Governor Scott has made it clear that his plans for education in Vermont is to make it more privatized and to send precious public money to unaccountable private and religious schools. This is very troubling to me. I do not want that for my students, my daughters or any student in Vermont, they all deserve better. Governor Scott has never been an ally to teachers, but this goes too far.

Thank you,

Hayley

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Dear Education Committee members,

I hope this message finds you well. As a dedicated educator with three decades of experience at Harwood Union High School, I am deeply invested in the welfare of our educational system. It is with this commitment in mind that I feel compelled to reach out to all of you.

In reflecting on my three decades as an educator, I cannot help but acknowledge the significant transformations that have occurred within the field of teaching. Throughout my career, I have witnessed firsthand the increasing challenges that educators face. Not only are we contending with evolving educational methodologies and diverse student needs, but we are also grappling with systemic issues that impede our ability to effectively carry out our roles. Finding qualified candidates to join our ranks has become a daunting task, exacerbated by obstacles such as housing shortages that make it difficult for prospective teachers to relocate. Moreover, the demands of the profession are steadily intensifying, leading to a concerning trend of teacher

turnover. As our job grows ever more complex and demanding, retaining experienced educators has become an increasingly formidable challenge. These issues underscore the critical importance of appointing a Secretary of Education who is attuned to the realities of our profession and committed to addressing the systemic barriers that hinder our ability to serve our students effectively.

I urge you to consider the implications of Zoie Saunders' potential appointment as Secretary of Education. While I respect diverse perspectives, her lack of substantial experience within public schools, coupled with her apparent inclination towards school consolidation and privatization, raises significant concerns in my mind and does not bode well for the current challenges in education that we face currently in Vermont.

Governor Scott's track record regarding educators has been less than supportive, and the prospect of Ms. Saunders assuming this pivotal role is deeply troubling. If educators were afforded a voice in this decision, I'm confident Ms. Saunders would not rank highly among our choices.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this critical appointment.

Warm regards,  
Wendy Peterson Rand (she/her)  
Harwood Union High School Art Dept. Head

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Dear Senators,

Please don't vote to confirm Governor Scott's nominee for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders.

As a public school educator, as a parent of a first grader in a public school, and as a Vermonter who cares about community institutions and social foundations; we can and must do better. Ms. Saunders has never worked in a school, and much of her experience is as an executive at a for-profit charter school company. Around 90% of Vermont's school-age children attend a public school, and while I won't pretend to know the answer to our current funding crisis, I know that our AoE leader must be willing and able to center the most vulnerable and impacted students. Someone who has never worked in a school, never mind a public school, will not be able to do this.

Thank you,  
Peter  
Moretown

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Dear Committee,

Governor Scott's pick for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders, is a mistake. It's the committee's job to make a confirmation recommendation (or not) to the full Senate. Ms.



Saunders has never worked in a school, and much of her experience is as an executive at a for-profit charter school company. Her job was to dismantle schools. Not build them. Given the current statewide budget crisis, our children--the vast majority of whom attend a public school--

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To whom it may concern,

I am at a loss as to how Governor Scott could suggest that Zoie Saunders is the best candidate for Secretary of Education.

I have been a public school teacher in the State of Vermont for 26 years. We in public schools face increasing challenges at every turn. As a result of these challenges, Vermont public schools are having a hard time attracting and retaining qualified educators to meet the intensifying student academic, behavioral, and mental health needs. Public schools are the means of educating the vast majority of children in the state of Vermont. How can Phil Scott, or anyone who has the best interest of children at heart, possibly consider Zoie Saunders for this position? Is there really no one better and more qualified?

The impact of this decision will have serious consequences on education in our state. The stakes are high. Public schools are at the heart of the communities in Vermont. Public schools are not simply tasked with educating children. We provide mental health resources for families and children, we make sure they are fed, and have the resources to be warm in the winter. We are a lifeline for the states' most vulnerable population. We are their voice. What experience does Ms. Saunders have with this, with her background in private schools?

Please continue your search for a qualified Secretary of Education. We need a leader in this position who will work to strengthen our public schools and has the experience to do so. Vermont cannot afford to take a step backward. Our communities deserve better than this.

Thank you,  
Michelle Marsh

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Dear Education Committee members and Washington county State Senators,

I write this evening to express concern regarding Ms. Saunders, and urge you not to confirm her nomination .

While I recognize that no one candidate will win everyone's approval, I think that this choice is the wrong choice for Vermont, especially at this critical time when property taxes are skyrocketing, over 1/3 of school budgets have failed, and we must look at how we fund public education in this state, all while making sure our kids have the opportunity for a quality public education..

Ms.Saunders is a former executive in charge of strategy for the multi-state **FOR-PROFIT Charter Schools USA** company. By nominating her, Gov. Scott ignored recommendations by The Vermont Superintendents Association, The Vermont Principals Association, and the Vermont School Boards Association, amongst others, urging him to seek a candidate with the qualities and

attributes of a proven “**strong leader and champion of public education.**” Her career has been focused on using public funds to develop and manage **for-profit** charter schools!

Vermont currently has no publicly funded charter schools, managed by for-profit multi-state corporations like Charter Schools USA. Why would we possibly open the door to having our precious tax dollars fund corporate salaries, bonuses, and stockholders?

If Ms. Saunders also had a strong background in public schools to balance her executive role in a private company, then perhaps she might offer Vermont some good thinking and leadership. But she does not.

I urge you to not confirm her, and send a message to the governor that we want someone in our top educational position that is committed to the public school model of education for our students.

Thank you, Judi Daly Moretown

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Dear Senators,

I am writing today to express my concern about Governor Scott’s appointment for Secretary of Education. I believe as the leader of our state, it is his responsibility to appoint someone with notable experience working in the field of education, not simply an adjacent, for-profit field. I was deeply disturbed to learn that the person our governor would like to appoint not only has no experience in public education, but also has experience working in the charter school industry. How can someone with no experience working in public education be expected to run an entire public education system?

I have worked in education since I was 15. I have worked as a classroom aide during summer programs, a substitute teacher, a summer school teacher, a camp director, and finally, a school librarian. I’ve been embedded in the Lamoille Union school system for my entire career. This school is my home and these students are my heart. I am writing to ask, as a veteran teacher, that you do what is best for my students and the students to come.

In my experience, our Agency of Education has suffered from inefficiency and a lack of knowledge of what is happening within the public school system. There are systems in place that simply do not work. We have many schools that are not meeting the minimum standards of the Educational Quality Standards. Much of the time, these schools are not meeting these standards by deciding not to fill positions with qualified educators, for example, schools that hire teachers to be librarians, even though they are not licensed as a library media specialist. We need someone in the Agency of Education, in charge of the AOE, who understands the successes and struggles of the public school system. Not only that, but we absolutely need someone who will be a strong advocate for students, teachers, and other educators. Our communities die when there is not a strong school system in place. We need someone who will fight for the best education possible for our public school students; someone who has not spent time in a public school, who couldn’t possibly know the issues facing students and teachers, who doesn’t understand how much time and effort and heart goes into showing up and educating every day, that is a person who cannot do the job we need. We need a strong Agency of Education, filled

with people who understand what is actually happening in schools, headed by someone who will fight for our public school students every day.

I believe that Governor Scott's pick for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders, is a mistake. I ask that you do not confirm her. Our students deserve someone who has worked in a school, not someone who has worked as an executive for a for-profit charter school company. We need someone who will do their best to protect and move forward our educational system in Vermont. That someone should have actual experience in schools. I hope that you will do what is right for our students, our teachers, and our communities and not choose Zoie Saunders.

Thank you for your time,

Meagan Towle  
Johnson, VT

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Dear Senators,

I am sure that Zoie Saunders is a lovely person, and probably a fine administrator. However, I think that Vermont students deserve a Secretary of Education who has experience in *running* public schools, not closing them.

According to her public profile on LinkedIn®, she graduated from a private girls' school where the tuition for next year is \$60,000 and the big draw is their equestrian program, so it appears she never attended a public high school either. Even if she possesses extraordinary empathy, I imagine that she might have trouble relating to the lives of my former students whose career goals involve skidders and excavators.

I think our students need someone with a bit more relevant experience.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Kate Davie

Ryegate, VT

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Dear Senate Committee Members,

I feel Governor Scott's pick for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders, is a poor choice. There seems to be this theme of people who have never lived in Vermont, are underqualified (Ms. Saunders has never actually worked in a school), and are out of touch with the needs of

Vermonters, being placed in influential positions. I urge you to consider *not* making a confirmation recommendation.

Give the children of Vermont someone better. Our education system needs someone who understands and cares about Vermont students.

Thank you for considering,  
Trisha Jackman (Lyndon Institute School Librarian)

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As of April 15, 2024 Vermont has a new education secretary named Zoie Saunders. She is utterly unqualified. She has for all reasonable sakes no strong history in public education. During an interview with Vermont Public Zoie stated "I'm a big believer in the importance of local communities being involved in helping to identify and articulate what those priorities are for their school." When she says this she has very little idea how it feels to be the small communities with public schools she was talking about. Zoie has actually according to public information never been part of a public school let alone a small public school. According to Forbes, Zoie attended a private all female school called Dana Hall School in Massachusetts. Upon graduating, Zoie decided to work in the pediatric healthcare system. After that she went on to work for Charter Schools USA. A charter school as described by National Charter School Resource Center is "A charter school is a public school that operates as a school of choice... Charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management but otherwise adhere to regulations of public schools." In her role at Charter Schools USA she was according to Forbes "she went to work in strategy for Charter Schools USA, a charter chain that operates in Florida as a for-profit business, in particular profiting from taxpayer-funded real estate business." One of her most recent jobs that she has had for six and a half years was for Fort Lauderdale. This job meant expanding opportunities for the education system. This included nonpublic schools. Finally in January 2024 Zoie took on her very first job in public education as chief strategy and innovation officer in Broward County Public Schools. This woman doesn't have a proper education or background in public education. To add to that, according to Mark O'Maley who defines himself as having "lifelong background in education and being deeply student-centered" he has made multiple points on why he feels that in no way should Zoie be put into this position. He made the statement that "Ms. Saunders does not possess a terminal degree in education or otherwise — she has a 30-credit master's degree from Vanderbilt University, and it is not directly related to teaching or working with students... it would not allow her to teach on the elementary or secondary levels in public schools — without licensure." As a child in a Vermont school I am terrified that an adult who is not LEGALLY ALLOWED TO TEACH of mine and my peers' learning. I feel that any person in charge of according to the National Center for Education Statistics 91,200 children needs to have a background as a student teacher and administrator in the public school system.

With great concern,  
Sarah Blackey

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To whom it may concern,  
My name is Hanne Carlson. I am an 8th grader at Flood Brook School in Londonderry, VT and I

would like to request that you submit my written testimony regarding the confirmation of Ms. Zoie Saunders to the education committee.

With Great Concern,

Hanne Carlson

Hanne Carlson

Confirmation of Zoie Saunders

23-4-2024

My name is Hanne Carlson and I am concerned that Zoie Saunders is not the best fit to be Vermont's new Secretary of Education. I am testifying about Zoie Saunders's lack of background in public schools. She has ample experience with independent schools, but Vermont's private schools only make up 30 percent of the schools. I am concerned that Zoie Saunders will not be able to improve Vermont's schooling system.

Zoie Saunders has a Master of Education in teaching. While she has an M.Ed she does not have a PhD or a Doctorate which means that she could not teach at a college. Given her qualifications, this also means that Zoie Saunders is unable to teach at public or private elementary or middle schools, without special permission. Currently, she can only teach at independent schools. Even though Zoie Saunders can teach, there is no record of her teaching or directly working with schools. My question is why should a person with no experience teaching, being a principal or a superintendent, be the head of these jobs?

In a press release that the official Vermont Government website posted Governor Phil Scott said "I have always believed that, given our enormous investment and commitment, Vermont is capable of having the best education system in the country, serving students from cradle to career..."(VGW Press Release) The Governor is saying that he wants to better the education system of Vermont by nurturing & working with the kids of Vermont. There has been no evidence that Zoie Saunders has a background of working with children in schools. So if she has not had experience with schooling kids how would she know how to change their schools for better learning?

Most of Zoie Saunders' work has been with charter schools. A charter school is supposed to bridge the gap between public and private schools. But it ends up dividing them more because the charter schools are taking the spots and funding from public schools, which causes the public school children to not be able to go to school. After all, there is still tuition. So the kids who are at or below the poverty level cannot go to any school or get any education.

When Zoie Saunders worked in Florida she worked with Charter Schools USA (CSUSA) which is a ForProfit business. After Zoie Saunders spent six years working at CSUSA she was the Chief of Education for Fort Lauderdale. In this position, she worked to "expand education opportunities" specifically for "nonpublic schools." So most of the work was only spent trying to better private and charter schools. These jobs have all been working with private schools or charter schools so this is where her background is. If you take a look at Vermont's percentage of private schools it is only 30 percent with 133 private schools serving about 13,385 kids. Compared to the 304 public schools which makes up the other 70 percent serving close to 80,150 children. Zoie Saunders' background lies in the 30 percentile of Vermont's schools because charter schools are illegal in Vermont. Zoie Saunders' background for most of her career is not with public schools, until January.

I believe that Zoie Saunders could do incredible things if she continued her work with private or charter schools. I just think that her taking on the role of Secretary of Education would not benefit a majority of kids schooling in Vermont. Thank you so much for reading this.

Sincerely,

Hanne Carleson

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To whom it may concern,

My name is Hana Heidebrecht. I am an 8th grader at Flood Brook School in Londonderry, VT and I would like to request that you submit my written testimony regarding the confirmation of Ms. Zoie Saunders to the education committee.

With Great Concern,

Hana Heidebrecht

As of the 15th of April 2024, Zoie Saunders was selected to be Vermont's Secretary of Education and is completely unqualified. The only experience she has with public schools is shutting them down. Not only did she never attend a public school, she does not have the degree required to teach or be an administrator at a public school. The only experience she has with school is in charter schools, when she worked for Strategy Charter Schools USA (CSUSA). CSUSA is a for-profit business that makes money from tax dollars. Charter schools are not permitted in Vermont. Her only arguable advantage has no purpose here. She is from Florida and has no experience with Vermont and its school systems. According to Forbes Magazine, "Saunders does have ties to Vermont; a sister and aunt live there. Otherwise, it's not clear how she was connected to this job. Governor Scott's office, which did not yet respond to a request for comment for this article, has said that Saunders will not be doing any more interviews until she's in office." Which raises red flags on why she is being considered for this job when she has very little experience working in education. There is record of her working as Chief Education Officer for the city of Fort Lauderdale, but when researching for what she did in that position all published articles are vague and do not specify what her job entailed, other than that she served over 800,000 students.

The only experience she has in public education is a new job that she got in January working for Broward County Public Schools, where her job was to lead in closing and repurposing schools. Why is somebody who has only worked in public school for almost 4 months, and has only closed and repurposed public schools considered for the position of Secretary of Education in Vermont? One critic said on their blog, Vermont Political Observer "The bad part is that her experience as a school killer and her years in the charter school industry are in perfect alignment with the governor's clear education agenda: spread the money around, tighten the screws on public education, watch performance indicators fall, claim that the public schools are failing, spread the money around some more, lather, rinse, repeat.

Saunders may not qualify as an educational leader, but her experience is directly relevant to Scott's policy." Which gives insight into the fact that the reason she may have been chosen for this position, is not because she was the best fit to be the Secretary of Education, but because she was the best fit to get the Vermont school systems into the position Gov. Scott wants it. When asked about her history in promoting charter schools and killing public schools, and anything related to her qualifications he chose not to

respond. Mrs. Saunders is a smart and capable woman. That does not mean she is qualified to be Vermont's Secretary of Education. Please exercise your duty and responsibility as the education committee and DO NOT allow her confirmation to move to the floor of the Vermont Senate.

With great concern,  
Hana Heidebrecht  
Vermont 8th Grade Student

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I write in support of the confirmation of Ms. Saunders as Secretary of Education. I do so not because I know her, nor even because I am fully at ease when I review her professional path to this role, but because I believe in giving people a chance before prejudging them based on what they might do. We cannot profess to be a welcoming state, open to a wide range of ideas and experiences, and yet when presented with newcomers in leadership roles, project the worst assumptions. It's important to have a healthy debate about the views and experiences of an incoming leader, and of course Vermonters can disagree about the merits of specific qualifications. Yet if we want to make Vermont's schools the best they can possibly be for our young people, we need a bigger and more diverse table of problem-solvers. We have much to do.

I expect that if you confirm Ms. Saunders, there will be plenty of opportunity ahead for all of us to come to conclusions about her actions. I'll be paying close attention as both a citizen-parent and as the leader of a nonprofit, built over four decades in Vermont, that is devoted to making learning possible and rewarding for every student. Meanwhile, for today, I hope you will give Ms. Saunders a fair chance to bring her perspectives and capabilities to bear on the complex array of issues facing our kids, our teachers, and our schools here in Vermont.

Thank you,

Laurie Quinn, Ph.D.  
President



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To the Senate Education Committee,  
I am a teacher in Rutland County and a mother of two kids in public school in Windsor County. I am concerned that the governor's nominee for secretary of education does not have sufficient experience with public education or Vermont. I fear her decisions will not be effective or supportive of our public school system.  
Thank you,  
Wendi Dowst-McNaughton

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Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing as a staunch supporter of public education. I ask that you carefully consider the confirmation of the Secretary of Education in your committee tomorrow.

I have read about the Secretary's background from several trusted sources in Vermont's media. I have found concern with the lack of frontline public education experience the Secretary has as either a teacher, principal, or superintendent. I am also concerned that her experience in education is in the area of for-profit charter schools and she is lacking experience in public education. I am committed to a publicly funded and a publicly accountable education system in Vermont. I am very concerned about the privatization of Vermont schools and the experience of this candidate reflects a continued move in that direction. We need a Secretary of Education that is committed to PUBLIC schools that are available to ALL Vermont's children.

Respectfully,  
Susan Barrett  
Norwich

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Dear Senate Committee on Education,

We are opposed to the appointment of Zoie Saunders as Secretary of Education due to her inappropriate educational and experiential background.

The Education Secretary is tasked with supporting the education of Vermont's children. This means understanding Vermont communities which are uniquely connected to their schools, perhaps due to the very small size of most communities. Most of our children are from moderate to low-income families. Therefore, Vermont needs an educational leader with a track record of study, research and support of inclusive public education. We need someone who brings a lifetime of study, experience and love of community schools.

Ms. Saunders has put all of her eggs in the charter schools basket. As a former preschool teacher and trainer of teachers, I have seen NO research to show that charter schools have better outcomes for children than public schools. Vermont is unique and strong state because of its love and support of community. A new Education Secretary needs to engage with and build on the strengths of Vermont communities and their love for their schools.

Sincerely,

Claudia Rose, Enosburgh Vermont  
Lewis Rose, Enosburgh Vermont

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Will you go outside the Montpelier "bubble" on a listening tour this spring to hear what the citizens of Vermont want for their schools?

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David Schoales (Skolz)  
(Prefers non-gender pronouns they, them)  
Brattleboro



"Responsibility is not lost, responsibility is abdicated."

James Baldwin

How quick come the reasons for approving what we like.

Jane

Austen

*"Understanding is not enough... you should be doing something to help fix this system."*

*Bernard Lown, MD*

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Good morning,

I wanted to express my concerns about the confirmation of Zoie Saunders as Secretary of Education as well as the status of funding at this time.

I have read the bio on Ms. Saunders and it is unexpected that our governor would propose a person with such little experience in public education to be our next Secretary of Education. I hope those of you with the power to vote no to confirm her, will. I am opposed, as are any colleague I have spoken to.

Our district is the 5th highest poverty district in the state of VT, and we are proposing a budget of about HALF of what it takes to educate each individual student in our state. Yet, we cannot pass a budget. I have been in VT for 15 years and have only seen it get worse and worse. Kids suffer the most. I wish folks with the power to make change could see kids on a regular basis and understand the impact. I'll leave it at that.

Thanks for reading my email and have a good day.

*Kim E. Prehoda (She/Her)*

Principal

Castleton Elementary School

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Dear Senator Gulick and others of the Education Committee,

I am writing to encourage you to look deeply into the Governor's nominee for Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders.

I am a retired teacher and am appalled that she has NO experience in any aspect of public education other than working towards closing schools. For me it is nonsense to appoint someone to a high level of any organization who has little experience in any part of it. It is clear to me and many others I speak with that the governor has an agenda and sought her out. I have no proof of that but hope you can get information during the interview with her. (I believe he has questions to answer himself.)

Vermont education is in dire need of support. We need people in all levels of education from our leaders to our teachers, to our support personnel, and to our families to be proponents of

PUBLIC education. Our tax dollars need to go to that system and not to For Profit charter schools.

I realize that financing public schools is a big issue for Vermonters, especially this year with high increases in taxes and the resultant voting down of school budgets. But giving our tax dollars to organizations that fill their coffers with our tax money is not the way to do it.

Are charter/private schools required to take all children in: children with learning difficulties, behavior issues, developmental delays? I see in the future a double standard. I see a division in the state between the haves and the have nots. That is not the way education to this point does business in the state. I see the loss of good teachers/staff. We need someone who knows and BELIEVES in public education - a system that levels the playing field. A system that provides education to all kids, no matter their background or socio-economic background - one Vermonters can be proud of.

I am not sure where her job was advertised. I don't think in the ways high leadership positions are posted. A good question for someone. Maybe the governor. Who was in the committee that vetted her? What was its goal?

Please do not shy away from the hard questions. A lot depends on the answers. And please notice how she answers. Does she side-step the answers to the tough questions? Look beyond her ability to use language well to her ability to tell the truth.

You have a difficult job ahead of you. Good luck!

Mary Jo McCarthy  
North Hero VT

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Hi,

My name is Amanda Calder. I live in Winooski and grew up in Vermont going to public schools. My dad, Jim Calder, aunt, Mary A. Calder, and grandma, Mary M. Calder were all public school teachers in Vermont for decades. I am an aunt of two kids not yet old enough for school, and have friends and neighbors who are students in VT public schools or who work in VT public schools as teachers, social workers, counselors, paraeducators, and behavioral interventionists.

It's vital that Vermont have a Secretary of Education who has experience serving students in school as an educator. Zoie Saunders has no experience teaching or supporting students directly in school. She does not have the kind of proven skills and experience necessary to do a good job as Secretary. It's very important that teachers' unions and the unions of support staff, as well as the school boards, principals, and superintendents be listened to regarding what we need in a Secretary.

Governor Scott has NOT listened to their input and seems to be recklessly picking someone who supports privatizing education with charter schools and doesn't really understand what's involved in having a quality, publicly-accountable education system.

I do not trust her to do a good job and to listen to students, families, and the professionals who have dedicated their working lives to serving students and their families. Vermont can do much better. Please do not confirm her as Secretary.

Also, please support Vermont transitioning to paying for public education with a progressive income tax. This tax should equally tax capital gains and also should tax investments that have accrued in value before being inherited by heirs (currently that accrued value is passed on to heirs and never taxed as income—one of the main ways wealth continues to get concentrated—this is something Vermont should tax as part of its regular income tax too). We must get away from the regressive system we have, where the wealthiest and highest-income taxpayers pay the smallest portion of their income towards education, and everyone else pays more.

Below are a few resources with information on paying for VT public schools with income tax, and the way that inherited investments are income that never is taxed and concentrates wealth.

Thanks for your work to help Vermont provide the public education system Vermont students deserve!

Amanda Calder

[A fairer, simpler way to fund education | Public Assets Institute](#)

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April 20, 2024

Vermont Senate Education Committee

Morgan Feldmann, Senate Education Committee Assistant, and Brian Campion, Chair., Martine Gulick, Nader Hashim, David Weeks, Terry Williams, Members, and Jane Kitchel NEK Senator

Attention: Action Alert: Education Secretary Confirmation

In reviewing the Curriculum Vita for Zoie Saunders, as the Interim Secretary of the Agency of Education, I see that she has had little personal, direct work with students, teachers and administrators within Public K-12 Schools. She has been quite successful as a grant writer in providing support for Charter Schools and other extensions or replacements of aspects of K-12 Public Schools. I believe there is little interest in separate charter schools in, at least, the Northeast Kingdom.

I would like to hear what her philosophy is for working directly with administrators, teachers, students and school board members throughout our State to meet our needs. We are focused directly with Vermont's Public K-12 Schools where we encourage the best education for our variety of students.

I also concur with the earlier recommendations made by the Vermont School Boards Association.

You are welcome to share my comments regarding her appointment with others on your web.

Sincerely,  
Diana Jordan Senturia, PhD, Mathematics Education, Retired  
Current Peacham VT School Board Member

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I am writing to express my concerns regarding Zoie Saunders as Secretary of Education. I do not want her to be our next Secretary of Education.

I feel very strongly, that despite her saying that she and Governor Scott are not looking toward privatizing our school systems, the fact that this has been her focus for her whole career means that this is an option that she will likely feel very comfortable moving toward. Even if she doesn't want to privatize our whole educational system, it is likely that she will look at using it at some point to see how it might work in Vermont. She will also be using that lens to look at issues and problem solving. Again, I do not believe that is the answer to the issues facing our educational system which has put so much of the burden on property tax holders. Just because someone says something is not their intention, it does not mean that is not what will happen. The issue is how much burden is being put on local towns to pay for societal problems/issues/solutions and not enough money is coming back to cities and towns from our state and national budgets. School personnel are expected to be solving too many local and national problems without support. Private schools are also not the answer. The amount of money that is now going to private, religious schools, is being taken away from our public schools which need to work with every student that walks through the doors as opposed to schools that can reject students they choose not to teach. It is completely wrong that taxpayers are now paying a significant amount of money to pay for religious education. What happened to separation of church and state? This is a much bigger issue, I know, but it fits into this conversation as well.

Enough said. Please reject this candidate.

Ann Lipsitt  
Essex Junction, VT

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Greetings,

I am writing to share my concerns regarding the appointment of Zoie Saunders as the next Vermont Secretary of Education.

With the struggles Vermont is currently experiencing with passing school budgets and creating safe equitable spaces for our children, it is a critical juncture in our state. It is also a golden opportunity to appoint a secretary of education with experience and vision that aligns with Vermont's commitment to public education for ALL students.

I am deeply concerned that Zoie Saunders is not the person Vermont needs right now to move in the direction that matches Vermont's philosophy.

I am asking that the Senate Education Committee hear the widespread concerns from the folks who are a part of our education system and recommend that the appointment not happen.

Please post my comments to the committee website.

Thank you for your attention.

Peg Sutlive

Lincoln School Board

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Good morning, I am writing to express concern about the proposed Secretary of Education. Educators from Michigan have told me the problems created by charter schools there. Children with disabilities are subtly or not so subtly encouraged not to attend charter schools. Teachers in charter schools do not have the same qualifications as public school teachers. Schools are managed to create profit for investors, not education for students.

In Vermont, where many schools are struggling with high special education costs and declining enrollment, we do not need competition from charter schools.

Thank you for considering this issue.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Mongan

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Dear Senator Gulick,

I taught in Vermont public schools for over thirty years and I have grave concerns about Governor Scott's education secretary choice.

She has never been a classroom teacher in a public, or even in a charter, school.

She has never been a building administrator - Principal or Assistant Principal - in a public, or even in a charter, school.

She has never been a Superintendent of a school district or supervisory union in a public school system or the equivalent level of administrator in a charter school system.

She has never provided any direct educational services to students or has ever been a member of an direct instruction educational team responsible for establishing the values, mission statement and achieving the related goals for student growth and achievement in either public schools or charter schools.

She has had a career path within the multi-state FOR-PROFIT Charter Schools USA company culminating in her executive position in charge of corporate strategy to achieve a Financial Profit for this private company using public tax dollars to finance their for-profit business model of education.

Before arriving in Vermont, she held a position for 3 months in Broward County, Florida government to develop plans to Consolidate small school districts and Centralize authority away from local school districts.

The future of our public education system is at stake!

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Bahrenburg  
North Hero

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Please post my comments on the Committee's webpage

Dear Senators of the Committee on Education:

I am writing you today in your leadership role for the upcoming confirmation process for Agency of Education Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders.

My message here is my personal statement and does not reflect the views of any board (South Hero School Board) or committee on which I serve.

Vermont deserves an Agency of Education Secretary who has a proven career track record as an advocate for public education with experience as a licensed educational professional who works effectively with all stakeholders in the public educational community, including students, families, publicly accountable boards of education and educational professionals, and state legislators, in addition to the communities of local districts and supervisory union taxpayers who pay the bills.

**The current Secretary-appointee, Zoie Saunders, should not be confirmed as Agency of Education Secretary since her career and credentials are not compatible with public education stewardship and leadership at the highest levels, but are instead based upon her career specializing as a strategist and tactician in the for-profit charter school and government sectors without the experience personally providing or directly managing the delivery of educational services to students.**

Although Zoie Saunders presents as a highly educated and very articulate corporate manager, she consistently downplays and avoids discussing her lack of public education expertise, having never worked as an public education or charter school teacher; public education or charter school building administrator, public education or charter school equivalent superintendent, or served as school board member, directly accountable to provide and monitor the resources for quality public education balanced with the taxpayers' ability to provide public funds for publicly managed educational services.

Although she may have the skills to facilitate consolidation and centralization of authority away from local districts, she does not have the requisite experience as a career public education professional and advocate with proven leadership in working with all stakeholders, including publically accountable legislators, to provide quality services to meet the multifaceted needs of our students:

1) Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders has never been a classroom licensed public school teacher - worked as a licensed or unlicensed teacher in a charter school.

2) Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders has never been a building administrator - Principal or Assistant Principal - in a public, or even in a charter, school.

3) Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders has never been a Superintendent of a school district or supervisory union in a public school system or the equivalent level of administrator responsible for managing the delivery of services to meet the multifaceted needs of students, either in a public school system or in a charter school system.

4) Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders has never served as school board member, directly accountable to voters to provide and monitor the resources for quality public education balanced with the taxpayers' ability to provide public funds for publicly managed educational services.

5) Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders has had a remarkable career path culminating in her executive position as Vice President of Strategy for the multi-state for-profit company Charter Schools USA, which uses public tax dollars to finance their for-profit business model of education. She achieved this career success, in part, by increasing this for-profit company's school "portfolio" and enrollment as well as the use of their "propriety curriculum."

I am writing to request that during the confirmation hearing process, your committee ask Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders to specifically articulate her vision for public education in Vermont and the role of the Agency of Education Secretary. Her understanding of the values and mission of the Agency are especially important in light of the current financial situation with the Educational Fund and the Governor's expressed interest in "structural reform" - consolidating public school districts, and reducing local control through greater centralizing of authority.

It is critical to this confirmation process that Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders states on the public record her thoughts on public educational funding, school consolidation, and the centralization of school governance authority. Given the Secretary-appointee's resume, it is also essential to ask her position about requiring non-public schools receiving public tax dollars to comply with the same requirement - including accepting students with identified special education needs; providing special education evaluations and supports; administering and reporting standardized academic growth and achievement assessments; and establishing diversity equity and inclusion standards.

The Vermont Agency of Education Secretary is one of only fifty state chief public education officer positions in the entire country with potential candidates from a nationwide pool of very highly qualified career public education professionals who have teaching and administrative experience at all levels.

In light of the above concerns, I am requesting that your Committee recommend a NO vote by the full Senate on the confirmation of the current Secretary-appointee Zoie Saunders.

Please request that the application process be reopened with a sufficiently funded nationwide search conducted with the services of a professional educational executive recruitment firm.

Until this past Monday, this position had been vacant for approximately one year, inclusive of the initial three month initial delay.

Please do not feel pressured to accept the current Secretary-appointee due to the crisis caused by the extended delay in recruitment or the current status of the educational funding system, which requires the leadership and experience of an extremely qualified Agency of Education Secretary.

Senators, thank you for your dedication and resiliency in providing for our public education system in Vermont.

Respectively submitted,

Richard Monterosso  
South Hero

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*Frank Davis*

April 17, 2024

Dear ladies and gentlemen of the Senate Education Committee:

My thoughts and concern about Ms. Saunders.

As I understand, there will be a hearing and a vote to confirm the governor's nomination for Secretary of Education. However in person testimony will not be part of the hearing. That saddens me.

Some of my concerns are similar or the same as the Vermont Education Association. I won't dwell on that. Regardless, I have read a copy of Ms. Saunders resume which can be found online.

Her resume makes her look very energetic, like a spitfire, rising so quickly in the education field. I have no concern about the accuracy of the resume document.

What I believe is woefully inadequate:

1. Her lack of time in education "in trenches." Having ever been in front of classroom of children, at any level. or as a school building administrator, nor has she worked in a school district at the superintendent, or assistant superintendent level.
2. Most organizations such as the military or business, and almost always in public schools, educational is filled with someone who came up through the ranks. And they usually make the best leaders.



3. For any new Vermont Education Secretary there will be a large learning curve. For someone who has never worked in a public school, it will be extra large. In a state largely rural and agricultural.

4. Vermont has so many truly rural districts it will require a great deal of study if one is not familiar with public schooling in farm areas. And a lot of mileage on her vehicle. More than she can currently imagine.

5. Add to that, the student population of Fort Lauderdale may be equal to, or larger than Vermont's, I don't know. But I believe she has never had experience with rural school districts that may take hours to arrive at, from the Department's address.

This appointment reminds me of the 1968 Republican Senate Primary. Perhaps some of you remember how little the candidate, a self made millionaire from Massachusetts, Jack McMullin, knew about Vermont. He got labelled as a carpet bagger and lost to Fred Tuttle. I am not suggesting you interview Ms Saunders and ask "How many teats on a Holstien and how many on a Jersey?" Or maybe I am. I hope she is willing to learn how to pronounce the towns of Wolcott and Calais.

When I talk to people who are not Vermonters and my friends about the Vermont I love and permanently came to, I tell them that no matter where you are in Vermont you will always see mountains. That once in a while, school budgets may fail but eventually they pass, because these are friends and neighbors. In the Spring the odor of manure is a reminder that we live in the most rural state. And I live in the most rural, coldest and I believe honest part of the state.

We in the Northeast Kingdom would welcome data driven reforms. I believe, however they will have to be carefully explained and proof submitted. Our children and our teachers and our school boards are, skeptical and accept change only gradually. On the other hand, I think we will resent and resist what seems to be pushing the modern ways on us.