

Testimony from Andrea Treadway, Chair Orwell Selectboard
Senate Government Operations
Regarding H. 875 – Regarding Municipal Ethics Legislation

My name is Andrea Treadway, and I am the Chair of the Orwell Selectboard. I am here today to give testimony from the perspective of municipal officials both elected and appointed. I have served the Town of Orwell in one capacity or another since 1997. I started volunteering on rescue and fire and have held many town and regional committees and boards since. Our Selectboard support efforts to strengthen the way municipalities conduct local business in an ethical, open manner, if it does not decrease local control and the accountability we have with our communities.

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has testified and made several suggested language changes to H. 875, which was not considered or implemented by the House Government Operations & Military Affairs committee prior to bringing this to the full House for passage. The Town of Orwell's Selectboard can't have someone here every day to speak out on behalf of our town, so we rely on VLCT to do it on our behalf.

Ted Brady's testimony on April 11, to this committee again highlighted the burdens that would place on municipalities to implement the bill as it is written. Ted's PowerPoint has a slide which shows the double standard between 3 V.S.A. 971-978 State Whistleblower Statue and the Proposed Municipal Whistleblower Statue in Section 22 subsection 1997 of H. 875. It emphasizes how municipal officials will be held to a different standard than state officials if H.875 passes into law without it being removed.

Another point to consider is how broad this law is with respect to who it covers and how it will create an undue burden on the town clerks with additional paperwork and reporting requirements. I would like this committee to consider the suggested changes and the impact to local municipalities if they are not implemented either in whole or part.

Orwell has a population of roughly 1238 and we have several elected and appointed positions unfilled. This is due to the mostly volunteer nature of not only Orwell, but most Vermont municipal positions. We either serve for free or a small stipend. This is not a career just a way to give back to our great communities and state.

In closing, I would like to state that the Orwell Selectboard as municipal officials and citizens do agree that ethics policies and training are necessary to help local officials do their jobs, build trust within their communities, and make local government stronger.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.