Submission to the Vt. House Education Committee
from Alison Lane Anand, School Board Member, Career Educator, Environmental Planner, and Business Owner

Education is my passion and mission. I am an 8th generation Vermonter and am proud of our state for its beautiful environment and efforts to provide equal opportunities for all students in education.

The "realignment of districts" is a concept which has been embraced as some panacea of hope for education in Vermont, without adequate study of the unintended consequences or philosophical basis in education. We need more study about the best learning environments for different age groups of children, optimum class sizes and school sizes for success, and transportation issues. My ideal of structure of an education system would offer small classes in intimate friendly environments for the youngest children (pre-K - K), with elementary schools being somewhat bigger but small enough when the principle knows every child. Then as children mature in middle school they can handle larger environments with more combined resources. At the high school level and post high school there could be more consolidation with more variety of opportunities.

I do not understand why in 2012 there was a stipulation which awarded over a half million dollars for research which would favor redistricting. How can it be called "research" if a predetermined result is financially rewarded? Was this the basis for the idea of forced redistricting?

An even more flagrant misuse of public funds, in my opinion, is the incentive section of act 153, particularly Sec. 17, the Modified Unified Union School District. Public funds (the Education Fund) are used to give tax incentives to vote for redistricting at the expense of those who vote to remain independent. This law has suddenly become about undermining voter rights because of this manipulation. I urge you to remove these kinds of incentives from the new bill and to repeal Sec. 17 because of the unequal division of assets in the high school + middle school. A good idea can stand on its own merits.

The consolidation of power by vastly reducing the number of school boards is a tragic consideration. We need more not less public participation. The school should be the most important building in town and used for many events and meetings. During the 27 years that I taught in public elementary schools, I saw a tremendous increase in the tasks that the school was asked to do. Many of these things used to be done at home by parents. The growing gap between the rich and poor in our country has created necessity for both parents holding jobs and being able to spend less time as families.

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This has had a significant impact on student learning and cultural development. Like everything there are some negative effects and some positive, but the bottom line is the schools are being asked to take more and more responsibility for the rearing of children.

Given this task, please take more time for public discussion around the state before taking such a ~~[illegible]~~ drastic step as forced consolidation. Many of the ideas proposed in the RED can be done within our basic structure without this upheaval which will divide, not unite, communities. The only cost savings we have seen are tax incentives, which as previously discussed, is a circular argument, perhaps even illegal.

We also need to re-evaluate how we fund education. Property taxes have become paralyzing and work against the preservation of the enviroment. That is a whole separate issue.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your sincere efforts.

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Alison Lane Anand
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