

Websterville Baptist Church, Christian School & Little Flock Nursery

PO Box 1 · 143 Church Hill Rd. · Websterville, VT 05678 · Phone: 802-479-0141 · Fax: 802-476-7834 ·

February 10, 2014

Representative Johannah Donovan, Chair
House Education Committee
State House
Montpelier, VT 05062

Dear Madame Chair,

Re: **H-827 Participation in Public School Activities by Students enrolled in Independent Schools**

Thank you for taking an interest in H.827 and allowing students from Websterville Baptist Christian School to testify. I am the Administer of the school and I can testify firsthand how involved the students of our 5th and 6th grades have been in this process. They have learned about “How a Bill Becomes Law”; met with Secretary Jim Condos about the various branches of government; did “opposition research”; helped draft letter to House members and other independent schools in Vermont to encourage them to support H.827; worked with Rep. Patti Lewis, who agreed to be the primary sponsor of the bill, which now has 28 legislative sponsors; they met with Representative Tom Koch and practiced testifying to House Education twice, and they drafted their own testimony. Last week, they toured the State House, and conducted a mock appeal in the Supreme Court.

Given the allotted time for testimony, I am concerned that not everyone will get a chance to testify, although grateful for the opportunity to present even for a half-hour. In case not everyone has the change to speak to the Committee, I would like you to know the key points that the students identified for why H.827 should be passed. They are:

- Importance of Community
- Fairness - Equal Access
- Choices for all students
- Promote Exercise and Good Health
- Skill Development – Leadership, Teamwork
- Team Development and Volunteering
- Taxes – sharing in some of the benefits

All of these points are highlighted in the testimony being submitted to you today either from the students; their teacher, Mrs. Pope; my testimony, and the testimony from several parents. If you have any questions or would like to hear additional testimony, we stand ready to provide members of the Committee with whatever information would be of assistance to them.

Very truly yours,

Mr. Bill Croteau Jr.
Administrator

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Kobe Morrison

6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Dear Madame Chair and Fellow Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Kobe Morrison and I go to Websterville Baptist Christian School. I am speaking to you regarding bill number H.827. I would like this bill to be passed for a few reasons.

I love to play all kinds of sports and I have learned many things from playing team sports. If students from private schools were allowed to join together on teams with the public school, these students would continue to learn skills, how to play fair, leadership abilities, and they would build their physical strength.

I believe we should have the same opportunities as those in a public or home schooled setting. Our parents pay school taxes in each town that we live in, yet we are not able to take part in sports or activities from the public schools. This would be a way that students from private school would receive a benefit from the school taxes that are paid by their parents.

This bill, if passed, would even help the public schools. Our parents would be able to volunteer for extracurricular activities, clubs, or sports teams. They

could be involved in fund raising and take part in helping out other parents within the communities that we all live in. Also, I have known that certain public schools sometimes fall short of the number of students needed to make up a certain team and have had to cancel that sport. If private school students were allowed to play, we would be able to fill those gaps and make a full team.

Please support H.827. Thank you.

H.27-Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of **Dalton Cody**

6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

For the record, my name is Dalton Cody. I am a 6th grader at Websterville Baptist Christian School. I want to start off by saying that I started playing sports on a team when I was three years old and since then, I have participated in either community sports or basketball for my school, which is the only sport my school offers. I have made many friends during the past 8 years and have played with the same kids over and over. These kids have become my friends and we do many things outside of sports like visit each other's homes and attend birthday parties together and other events.

The only difference between us, is the schools we go to. Our parents have chosen different schools for us for different reasons. I love my school and everything about it; however, when it comes to sports or extracurricular activities, there are more sports that I would like to participate in than the one our school offers. Currently it only offers basketball.

The Little League teams that I have played on since I was 5 have an ending league age of 12, which means this is the last year for me. I will be crushed if I am told, like some of my friends, that I cannot play baseball anymore. I have a real love for baseball and have had a dream of making it to the MLB to play for the Yankees since I was very little.

I know that sometimes there are exceptions and an independent school student can be invited to play for a public school if there are not enough kids on a team. I think it is a matter of fairness that everyone is given the same chance to play. I do not want to take anyone's position on their team, but I would like to be able to try out for a team. Some homeschooled friends of mine have this chance to do this. I

would like the same chance to play with the same kids that I have played with through all the years.

If this bill gets passed, some day you will see me playing for the MLB on TV.
Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Seth Morgan

6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Dear Madame Chair and Fellow Committee Members... for the record my name is Seth Morgan, I am a 6th grade student of Websterville Baptist Christian School. I am here to testify about H.827.

One topic which was brought to our attention by a legislator in response to the letters we sent to members of the House of Representatives was the question of Separation of Church and State. I would like to address this issue and how we feel it does not apply in this situation.

First of all as you know, Separation of Church and State is actually part of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment – which allows for Freedom of Religion.

We think that this clause does not apply in this instance because playing sports teaches us many important and transferable skills that transcend any reference to religion. Traits that are essential for all students to know in their daily lives – skills that are more universal in their nature – skills that everyone should know to live successfully in our communities and workplaces.

For example in addition to building physical strength, sports teach leadership skills, fair play, team building and good conduct among other things. Sports teaches us how to get along with others on your team and how to follow rules and demonstrate good sportsmanship.

I hope you will consider supporting H.827. Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Cody Collins

6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

For the record, Madame Chair, my name is Cody Collins. I am a 6th grade student at Websterville Baptist Christian School. I am here in support of H.827 because I believe there are many benefits to playing sports. They include first getting all students active and staying healthy. Second it gets students off of video games and phones. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, sports help develop good traits such as leadership, teamwork, sportsmanship, fair play, teambuilding, good conduct, and many more, along with physical strength. Sports help your social skills too.

Another important thing to add to this conversation is that our parents pay property taxes, and the money goes into the public schools. Yes, I agree, it's their choice to send us to the school we go to, but if we could play sports and extracurricular activities for public schools, which would allow our parents to share in the benefits of the system they pay for.

This bill, if passed, would provide me with the opportunity to do something I have been unable to do, and that is play sports outside of school. This would allow me and others to get out more and interact with others from my community. I would welcome this opportunity and want to encourage you to support H.827 for me and all the students in my town.

I urge you to support H.827. Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Josephine Moulton

6th Grade Students

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

For the record Madame Chair, my name is Josephine Moulton, I am a 6th grader at Websterville Baptist Christian School. As an avid basketball player, I would like the option of playing in high school, and with a lot of hard work, to play in college. As the law stands, I would not get that chance to even try. Due to the lack of players this year, we have only one all girls basketball team. By the time I get to high school there is a chance there will be no team at all. If this bill passes, I will have the opportunity to pursue my passion.

One important thing to remember is that several of us, if we want to play sports, would have to leave our school and go to a public school. We love our schools, we have grown up in our school and do not want to leave. If H.827 were to pass, we would be able to play sports and stay in our school – the best of both worlds for us.

I urge you to vote for H.827. Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Nick Hood

6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Dear Madame Chair and Fellow Committee Members,

For the record my name is Nick Hood from the 6th grade at Websterville Baptist Christian School.

I have been playing team sports since I was in 1st grade. Our parents pay the same taxes that the children's parents pay that go to public schools. I understand that you may be worried about our taking the place of the other children on the team, but in fact under H.827, we would be following the same rules and regulations that apply to homeschoolers. Some schools don't even have enough students to make up a full team. Students from independent schools who qualify might be able to allow a public schools to have a team – perhaps two. Allowing independent schools students to participate in public school sports and extracurricular activities might benefit the public schools sports teams which, in turn, would benefit public school students.

Most independent schools stop offering sports after 6th grade. We would like physical education to be available to all students after 6th grade. This bill would do just that and I encourage your to support H.827. Thank you.

Baptist Church, Christian School & Little Flock Nursery

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February 10, 2014

Dear Madame Chair and Fellow Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Mr. Bill Croteau, the Administrator of Websterville Baptist Christian School. On behalf of independent school students across the state, I would like to thank each of you for being willing to debate this bill. Vermonters have always been proud of their ability to effectively reason through the merits of various debates and other public discourse. I appreciate that this group will be carrying on that proud tradition.

During the course of this debate, you have and will hear various reasons, for and against this bill. For me, it boils down to one issue... Is our, or any educational institution, in existence to benefit children (which it should be) or does it exist to benefit taxpayers, parents, corporate sponsors or even the NEA? If we were truly operating in the best interest of children, we would seize this opportunity to give students from small independent schools the opportunity to play athletics in sports that require larger numbers. We can achieve this by requiring local public schools to give independent school students the opportunity to try out, etc.

As we begin recognizing the importance of the student in this debate and allow this opportunity, I believe society will ultimately benefit, as students take the lessons they learn relating to leadership and team play and apply them in their future roles as leaders of America and, indeed, across the world. The better rounded an educational experience a student has, the more effective future leaders they will become. This bill would allow all students the opportunity to participate in this well-rounded education. I encourage you to consider what role you would have in being part of decisions that will affect future American and world leadership.

Thank you again for taking the time to hear these students and other members of the community in this important debate.

Sincerely,

Mr. Bill Croteau, Jr.
WBCS Administrator

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools
Testimony of

Mrs. Karen L. Pope, Teacher

5th and 6th Grade Classes

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Hello Madame Chair and Fellow Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Karen Pope. I am here to testify in support of H.827, the bill submitted by my 5th/6th grade class with the help of former Representative Pat McDonald. I have taught 5th/6th graders at Websterville Baptist Christian School since 1995. I also have three children who are graduates of WBCS, so I am able to bring the perspective of both a parent and an educator to this issue.

As a teacher, it has been exciting to work with this class in researching and writing this bill. I, myself, have gained significant knowledge about Vermont State government from watching and listening to my hard-working students.

While doing research for this bill, we learned that the public school/independent school connection varies from school to school. In some communities, private school students are allowed to play on public school sports teams because that particular school has a strong positive relationship with the community. In other communities, this is not the case. Public school extracurricular participation should not be based upon the relationship that a particular school has with the community, but rather on a public law where all students have the same access to public school extracurricular activities.

The parents of my private school students pay taxes just like public school and home school parents. Homeschooling parents already have access to publicly funded extracurricular activities for their children. If one group has the option to

participate in public school extracurricular activities, then all students should be given the same access.

As an educator, I feel that passage of this bill would benefit independent school students by giving them additional opportunities to interact with and learn from the surrounding community and the world around them. One of my goals as a teacher is to motivate kids to look beyond their own little world and interact with other people. Passage of this bill would provide just that.

Thank you for your time and support concerning this bill.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Adam Kelley

Parent of a 6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Dear Madame Chair:

For the record, my name is Adam Kelley, a parent of three students at Websterville School. You have certainly heard and read many valid points as to why students of independent schools in Vermont should have open access to extra-curricular activities, including sports, at our public schools. I would echo these points, and also say that this bill encourages and fosters a sense of community within our small towns.

As a parent, my social network, outreach, support, and volunteer time is centered on what my children are involved in, and thus, their school. Our diverse, independent schools are overflowing with parents that would play an active role on committees and boards, volunteer at public school fundraisers, and greatly enhance that sense of “community” that we all enjoy. Allowing all students to have an opportunity to participate encourages our sense of inclusion, and enhances the diversity that make up many of our schools.

Seeing this 5th and 6th grade class be so actively involved, and passionate about the legislative process gives me a great deal of hope in the future of our education in Vermont. As a middle school coach, I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know many of our Vermont teachers, directors, students, and faculty all over the state for the last few years. I have been very impressed by the quality of the schools that I have worked with, and likewise, the students. This is certainly a result of our past commitment to our educational system by our government, lawmakers, teachers, and parents. Passing legislation like this one at hand will ensure that we continue in the right direction.

Please vote “Yes” for H.827. Thank you

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Beth Cody

Parent of a 6th Grade Student

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

For the record, my name is Beth Cody, and I am here to advocate on behalf of independent schools students that do not have funds for certain sports or extracurricular activities not currently offered in their schools. At this time in Vermont, home school children are allowed to participate in public school sporting and extracurricular events, but independent school students are not. Some independent schools in this state are able to offer sports and many extracurricular activities, but I am asking for support for those students that do not have the opportunity currently in their own schools, as a matter of fairness.

Only 11% of Vermont's K-12 students attend an independent school. Vermont's independent schools vary in mission and size, ranging from over 900 students to as few as 6 students, in all age groups. Vermont's independent students meet the needs of full spectrum of learners and include students from all social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These students represent a very small fraction of students in the state of Vermont. Ninety towns in Vermont already have school choice, allowing parents to choose a public or independent school for their children with a voucher payment system.

As I am sure you know home schoolers are allowed by statute to participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. H. 827 allows for the same opportunities for students of independent schools under the same rules and regulations that apply to home schoolers.

Children attend independent schools for many reasons and, where a parent decides to send their children for their education, does not damper their children's desire to want to participate in sports or extracurricular activities. I think it is important that parents be given the opportunity to education their children as they see fit while supporting the needs and desires of their children to participate in sports and extracurricular activities, just as the state did with regard to homeschoolers. This bill is about the children.

There may be a direct benefit to some of the public schools by providing a slightly larger pool of talent for the public school tryouts. The numbers will not be significantly higher, but with the many dwindling school sports and lower student numbers, this may allow schools to have full rosters on their teams. In addition, being involved in team sports will allow all students both public and independent school students to learn many new skills together to become better players and through competition, build strength and character. Another obvious benefit is health related. We know playing sports allows for regular exercise that has been proven to be vital in fighting obesity and high blood pressure. Other known benefits of team sports also include academic, social and actually career benefits.

Most of the testimony you will hear today is primarily focused on sports. But we cannot forget that H. 827 provides opportunity for students to participate in all extracurricular activities – even those not interested in sports. A local school in my area offers 37 organizations and clubs ranging from gardening club, ping pong club, scrapbooking club, to jazz band and a marching band. This legislation would offer an important juncture for these students to be able to branch out and succeed in life in so many ways. If these organizations and clubs are offered outside of the curriculum day, then it would be another wonderful opportunity for these students to broaden their experiences.

Please support H.827 which would allow independent school students the same opportunities to play sports and participate in extracurricular activities the same way homeschoolers have been given this right.

Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Michelle Bello

Parent of 5 school aged students

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Madame Chair, for the record my name is Michelle Bello, a resident of Barre Town. I have six children with 5 of them school age. Our children have been in public school and home schooled. Currently, I have 1 senior at Spaulding High School and 4 at Websterville Baptist Christian School.

I am here to talk about H.827 and why we need this bill. I believe this bill is about equal access. This bill is about community. This bill is about all students in the State of Vermont. Our current law already allows for “public high school choice” with many students attending high schools out of their districts, playing sports and participating in extracurricular activities and also allows for home schooled students to participate in extracurricular activities and sports programs in schools in the district they live in. The only students being left out of equal opportunities and access to these programs are students attending independent schools.

Times have changed. We no longer live in a time where the majority of kids go mainly through the public schools system together. People today move frequently, are home schooled, and through high school choice, may go to different schools than their friends. You also have kids from various schools playing sports together outside of school in programs such as Mini-metro, AAU and Capital Soccer. The problem is that no everyone can afford these pay-to-play programs. You also have the problem of declining public school populations. A couple of years ago, Montpelier could not field a cross-country team and this past year, they couldn't field a football team.

Supporters of this bill, like me, are taxpayers, parents and concerned citizens who are only asking that all Vermont students be given the same access and opportunities for their good and the good of our communities.

Please join me in supporting H.827 for the sake of all students. Thank you.

H.827 – Participation in Public School Activities by Students Enrolled in Independent Schools

Testimony of

Celeste Moulton

Parent of 6th and 4th Grade Students

Websterville Baptist Christian School

Thursday, February 20, 2014

For the record, Madame Chair, my name is Celeste Moulton, parent of a 6th and 4th grader at Websterville Baptist Christian School. I believe academics is not the only vital part of a child's education. They also need to learn to participate in group and team situations, whether it be sports or an extracurricular clubs. Being involved in such activities will give them skills and self-esteem that will far surpass their high school years and even college.

Yes, it is my choice to send my kids to a private school, but as a tax payer, passing this bill would be a way to share the benefits of the system we are helping to support. I've tried to teach my kids from a young age to be involved, try different things, find your passion, and keep all doors open. I'd hate to see this door shut!

As a matter of fact H.827 is about choices. I would like to see all independent schools have the choice to have their students participate in the extracurricular activities of the public school. We know that our children would need to follow the same requirements as those of homeschoolers and as parents would be willing to volunteer to do whatever is necessary to help with any fundraising initiatives to keep the extracurricular activities going.

I urge you to support H.827. Thank you.