

Caledonia North **CNSU** Supervisory Union

Burke Lyndon Newark Sutton Miller's Run
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Testimony to the House Education Committee

January 22, 2014

Good morning legislators. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you regarding how public and independent school education works in the Northeast Kingdom. My name is Victoria Scheufler. I have served as superintendent in Caledonia North Supervisory Union since 2007, representing Town Schools in Burke, Lyndon, Newark and Sutton, one union district, UD#37 operating Miller's Run School for the Towns of Sheffield and Wheelock, and East Haven a non-operating district. None of these school districts operate a public 9-12 high school.

I intend to clarify two points and am asking you to look deeply into these issues. I believe the solution to the dilemmas I will present will require statute changes as well as State Board of Education Rules and Regulations revisions.

1. My plea is not for or against school choice. For example, in East Haven where neither public elementary or high school is offered, parents have choice. Title 16, section 823(b) limits the amount of elementary tuition that can be paid to an independent school not to exceed a calculated average. That works nicely.

Section 824, likewise, limits tuition paid to independent schools for high school to the average announced tuition of Vermont union high schools. Public high schools establish tuitions approved by voters. That works as well.

However, notwithstanding the above, two independent comprehensive high schools, jointly serving as the St. Johnsbury Region Career and Technical Education Center, set their own tuition rates. The independent Boards of Trustees, who do not answer to the public, are not limited by statutes. The annual tuition costs paid for every student who, by choice, goes to either of these schools has been \$2000 to \$2500 per student, or more, higher than public high school tuitions. This unregulated higher cost is draining the amount left in the overall budgets that operate public schools. Example: 400 students X an extra \$2500 each = ONE MILLION DOLLARS annually. We generally have only 20-40 part time Tech students each year.

2. A second point is the functioning of the Regional Advisory Board, RAB, for the St.. Johnsbury Region CTE Center. The duties of the RAB are spelled out by statute, however, they are not embraced or adhered to by our Region's RAB. I am concerned that for every single high school student attending either comprehensive independent high school, tuition money is flowing in without governance or even guidance from a public body. I am concerned that this unregulated flow of tuition is depriving public schools of the funds they need to operate. When public districts are asked to cut PreK-12 spending or when the voters favor curbing the expenditure of tax dollars for public education, the portion of the funds for PreK-8 schools in the Northeast Kingdom shrinks drastically. High school tuition is untouched.

Thank you, in advance, for your careful consideration of these matters. I am looking forward to a better understanding of how independent schools work in Vermont.