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To: Alice Miller; Ann Manwaring; Bernie Juskiewicz; David Sharpe; Emily Long; Kevin Christie; Kurt Wright; Larry Cupoli; Sarah E. Buxton; Scott Beck; Tim Jerman; Marjorie Zunder
Subject: POSSIBLE SPAM: Written testimony regard H.361

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The following is written testimony regarding H.361

There have been some strange predilections regarding our state's education system on display in the Vermont Legislature, and two of them have raised their heads in the latest draft of the Senate ed committee strike all proposal for H.361 (draft 2.1, 4-13-2015).

The first strangeness I'm referring to is this concept of punishing the communities for the perceived failings of their school boards by applying excess taxes to the local school tax rates. We saw this in the defeated House proposal dealing with teacher strikes and school board contract impositions where a penny would have been added to the local tax rates if board/teacher negotiations weren't wrapped up in a set time frame. The Senate ed committee continues this strangeness with a proposed 5% tax penalty to be applied to local school tax rates when the supervisory union board of the applicable SU fails to faithfully abide by the board duties as defined in statute.

The second strange predilection is this push to have local communities vote directly on the supervisory union budgets. I know this concept makes sense for those who believe that SUs are nothing but bureaucratic overhead and who would like nothing better than to put a bunch of overpaid administrators in their place. The truly damaging aspect of this proposal is that those who think like this are likely to rule the day.

The general view of SUs, even in the legislature (just ask Sen Benning how many times he has stated those in the SU do nothing but move red tape around), is very different from the reality of a well run supervisory union. The first thing to do is look up the statute dealing with the duties of the SU board that the Senate ed committee wants to punish taxpayers for the SU board not adhering to. There is no bureaucratic overhead involved for the SU staff to carry out the details of the legally mandated board policies and decisions.

The reality of supervisory union/district relationships is much more intertwined than even that however. The duties of Superintendents, who act through the SU, are defined in a myriad of locations in Title 16, and the services provided by SU staff such as business managers and curriculum directors and more are more often than not replacing in a more efficient manner the same services that would otherwise have to be provided in the local district house.

Please think about this very carefully.