

Grant Geisler: House Ways & Means Committee Testimony - March 11, 2015

Dear Committee Members,

By way of introduction, I am a past President of the Vermont Association of School Business Officials (VASBO), I work as a Business Manager for the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union in Essex Junction, and I am a resident of Plainfield.

The following feedback goes beyond the scope of what you requested. It also represents my own opinion and not that of VASBO.

Declining Enrollment – Sec 14, paragraphs (b)(1) and (2): I would like to see changes to the effective date, transition details, and protection for districts that haven't previously received protection.

1. **Effective Date** – Districts that receive hold harmless protection may be exploring governance change (e.g., Westford School District is part of a study committee to examine forming a Regional Education District [RED]). If they take the necessary steps, the governance change is unlikely to take place until FY18. An effective date of FY17 doesn't provide enough time for a district to take corrective actions to avoid the penalty of losing hold harmless protection. I would like to see the effective date shifted to FY18.
2. **Transition** – For districts currently receiving hold harmless protection, the threshold would drop from 96.5% to 90% in FY17 and 80% in FY18. For most districts, this does not allow for a transition – they would simply lose all protection in the first year. A more realistic transition would be a drop from 96.5% to 93.5% to 90%. Using these percentages, one of my districts would lose about half of their protection in the first year and would receive no protection in the second year.
3. **New Protection** – The current threshold of 96.5% would be applied to districts that are newly qualified for hold harmless protection. It doesn't seem equitable to apply two different thresholds.

Integrated Education Systems (Tuition) – Sec 17, paragraph (g)(3)(A): This language appears to allow a preK-8 district to continue to offer school choice for high school students even if the district joins an Integrated Education System (IES) which includes a high school. If so, it doesn't seem like the IES would truly be "integrated." In addition, this allowance may automatically extend to other districts joining the IES – even if they don't currently have choice. I would prefer that students be educated within the IES with the exception of participation in the statewide school choice option.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Grant Geisler