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MEMORANDUM

TO: House Committee on Corrections, Community High School of Vermont
FROM: Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary
SUBJECT: Proposed Changes to Community High School and 28 V.S.A. §120
DATE: 03/10/16

Thank you for the opportunity to learn about proposed changes with respect to Community High School of Vermont and Corrections Education this morning. As asked, I have reviewed both the proposals and the suggested changes to 28 V.S.A. §120. I summarize AOE's position and suggestions below.

Proposal 1

The primary ask is a statewide agreement between Adult Education and Literacy (AEL; although it is termed Adult Basic Education in the proposal) and the new Corrections Education to "accept each others [sic] students and learning plans, thereby permitting students to continue education seamlessly." We seek to clarify a couple of points.

First, our assumption is that your intention is to create smooth transitions for students exiting corrections and entering AEL settings. By definition, a student could NOT be both in Corrections Education and enrolled in AEL services. We believe this is consistent with the position in the Joint Legislative Corrections Oversight Committee's Report (DRAFT), p. 10:

"The Committee takes that position that it is not appropriate for the non-incarcerated population to attend CHSVT, but recommends that there should be a clear path towards education if the CHSVT street sites function as a point of entry."

We support the goal of a seamless education for incarcerated students once they formally exit Corrections. We agree that a natural partner for this would be AEL service providers, currently numbering four statewide. The AOE would be happy to help facilitate connections between these service providers and Corrections in order to craft sustainable local agreements that honor Corrections personalized learning plans. We suggest that key leadership and field staff from both Departments/Agencies come together soon to discuss this. However, the AOE does not possess, nor is it seeking

direct authority over any potential party to such an arrangement. AOE can and does contract with the independent service providers who carry out the goals of the federal AEL program, but we cannot compel or require a partnering provider to enter into any agreement with another party, along the lines suggested by this proposed legislation.

Proposal 2

The AOE does not favor transferring oversight of the Corrections Education/Community High School budget to AOE. We agree that this would unduly disrupt current staff and students.

Comments on proposed changes to 28 V.S.A. §120

(a) It is unclear what the intent/goal of the education program would be as it does not specifically include completion of secondary education (i.e., diploma and/or GED) as a focus. Is the new language proposed in order to include education services for students who have already completed their secondary education credential?

(h) We suggest removing the following language: ~~“The Commissioner may approve the participation of other students, including individuals who are enrolled in an alternative justice or diversion program.”~~

In addition to fiscal reasons, we believe it is critical that we separate AEL services from Corrections services. There is strong commitment by education advocacy groups to ensuring that we are not creating school-to prison pipelines. Our Adult Education programs can serve all students who do not need to be in restrictive settings. However, we do not feel a school run by Corrections and serving primarily a Corrections population should be serving students who are not under the supervision of Corrections. Therefore, we do not believe it makes sense or supports the public policy rationale for CHS to have students enrolled there that are not under the custody of the Commissioner.