

Dear Senators,

I am writing this letter to tell you how the S.175 bill would help me, and students like me complete school. I am currently a sophomore at South Burlington High School, but that could all change depending on the outcome of the S.175 bill. I was homeless for a long time, up until March of this year. I had been homeless for more than two-thirds of my life, living in lots of different places like friends' houses, hotels, homeless shelters, and cars. These struggles made it hard to stay in one place for very long, I had been to twelve different schools by the time I was in eighth grade, the longest that I had had stayed at one school was two years, until I came to South Burlington.

When I first transferred to South Burlington I did not think that I would like it, and I definitely did not think that I would have stayed as long as I have. Since becoming a student in the South Burlington School District, I have developed a sense of community and have become friends with some amazing people over the last few years. I immediately felt as if I belonged, the teachers were nice and my peers helped me find my place, I thought that South Burlington would be just another school that I would go to for a year or two, and then move on to the next. I tried not to get too attached to the people or the school because I knew that it wouldn't be long before I would move again, and it wasn't.

The day that I finished seventh grade I moved to Maine with my mother. We could not afford to stay during the summer because my mother was a school bus driver at South Burlington and she could not work during the summer. So, we left to go live with my Grandfather in Maine, this was by far the hardest move that I had to deal with. My mother and I spent that summer in Maine and I was enrolled into the local school, and I absolutely hated it, it wasn't the people, they were all very nice, it was the fact that I was not being challenged, there were no obstacles, everything that I was learning was very cut and dry, there was no fun, and there was no variety. So after attending school in Maine for approximately a month, we packed our things once again to return to Vermont.

We stayed with my friend and her family that lived in South Burlington, we had become best friends in the year that we had known each other. I reenrolled at South Burlington, my mother found a job and we moved out, we started staying in more hotels, moving out every twenty-eight days, to build a new "home" in another hotel, but sometimes there were no open rooms. Most nights after we had moved our belongings out of our room, we did not know where we were going to stay, especially if it was a holiday or there were events going on in the area. The prices of hotels and motels got so high that both of my brothers had moved in with us to try and help, but even then it wasn't enough to move up in the world.

It takes a lot out of a person when every few weeks you have to pack up everything you own and move, I watched as my mother made herself sick with worry. My mother was always worrying about where we were going to stay, what we were going to eat, if she would have enough gas to get to work, would her van even start in the morning, there are just some of the things that I had absolutely no control over. I watched as she worried hopelessly. There are some things in life that we have absolutely no control over, sometimes our opinions don't matter, and what we have to say doesn't matter, but in this situation, I can do something to help others. This bill would not only help me, but thousands like me, this is why I am strongly encouraging you to pass the S.175 bill, so that I can stay in my community and continue to make it better for future generations.

My family and I would remain homeless until March of 2014. On February 29th my mother signed the lease to our first apartment in seven years, we finally had a place to call home, but there was one problem, it is in Burlington. This means that I could apply for school choice, and possibly stay at South Burlington, but because there are a limited number of slots I unfortunately did not get accepted, this means that if the S.175 bill is not passed I will have to go to school number thirteen, Burlington High School. It is estimated that each time a student changes schools it sets them academically back four to six months, and 75% of homeless youths drop out of school. My older brother is part of that 75%, he attended so many different schools and was so far behind academically, that he dropped out of high school.

One of my goals in life is to graduate high school and to not become part of that 75%, I have thrived to overcome my challenges, and I will continue to thrive and be the best that I can be. I put effort into everything that I do both in and outside of school, because South Burlington High School has been the only constant in my life for the past two years, my grades were the one thing in my life that I could control. I could have chosen to not do homework, not study, and ultimately fail, but I didn't, I chose to challenge myself and never give up, no matter how hard things got, and that is why I am writing this letter to you, so you can see the challenges that I have overcome, but I cannot overcome this challenge by myself, so I am asking you to help me with this obstacle. The S.175 Bill is necessary for students in tough situations to succeed in the educational system, students like me need to be able to at least have the choice of where they would like to continue their education.

Sincerely,

Michaela Hyde