

MEMO TO: Mr. Jim Condos, Secretary of State

FROM: Alison Lane Anand, concerned citizen and school board member, November 17, 2014

RE: School Merger Vote in Chittenden East School District, November 4, 2014

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I am very concerned that we have just had an election which may be illegal.

In 2012, The Vermont Legislature passed a law which permitted a variation of the RED, referring to consolidation of school districts. It is Sec. 17 of Act 156, the Modified Unified Union School District. At the time, I was troubled by several aspects of this law and wrote to the Chittenden East School District Executive Committee my concerns in June 2012 (letter enclosed). In 2013, the Executive Committee appointed a Voluntary Merger Committee to research the merits of implementing this law in our district. The Voluntary Merger Committee almost immediately began to compose the Articles of Agreement and set upon the task of bringing about the merger. Their stated goal was to bring it to a public vote on Nov. 4, 2014. This is the first time the Modified Union district has been implemented. Many citizens have felt confused about the merger and found the process of public input unsatisfactory, rushed, and unfair to say the very least.

Primarily, the voter has been treated unfairly. This is of great concern to me as it is an undermining of citizen voter rights. Please consider the following:

1. The ballot is so confusing that people had trouble understanding it. There is no clear consequence of a YES vote because of the default mechanism of the unknown result of how many towns would vote YES. Therefore, a voter who liked the idea of a complete merger but not the modified merger had no real choice, and vice versa. It is my understanding that a question on a voting ballot is legally required to have a clear "yes or no" choice.
2. The Voluntary Merger Committee's Modified Unified Union Report/Plan (which was the official document presented at all the public hearings and available in town offices) contains no specific information about the assets and liabilities which the voter would be asked to assume. This involves millions of dollars of public assets and is a central issue. A number of people have expressed dismay at question (c), Assumption of Debts and Ownership of School Property, not understanding what this really involves.
3. It is discriminatory to offer temporary tax breaks to voters of towns who vote YES. These are public funds, redistributed in a manipulative way. Some citizens consider this to be bribery. This appears to me to violate Article 8 of the Vermont State Constitution.

Please advise. Was this election legal? What can be done to rectify such improprieties from happening again? Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

Alison Lane Anand, career educator, business owner, environmental planner