

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON HOUSE S.122

Submitted by Douglas Korb, Marlboro School

To the Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for granting school board members like myself the space to provide testimony on S.122; a bill all board members of unmerged districts are following very closely. I wish I could have provided this testimony in person, but my absence at the testimony is one of the main reasons I am writing to you now. In lieu of appearing in-person, I am attending an Act 46 meeting in a neighboring district that was one of two towns to vote No on a merger with my district, Marlboro (Marlboro was the second district in that proposed merger to also vote no). We are one of the many “unmerged” districts that will likely be submitting an Alternative Structure Proposal in November 2017.

The reason I am attending the meeting with the neighboring school is to understand as much information as possible on what is acceptable vs. not acceptable in an Alternative Structure under the new AOE draft rules, since Donna Russo-Savage of the Agency of Education will be attending the meeting. All too often you will see board members doing what I am doing: grasping at straws to understand what is allowed and what is not allowed under the structures in Act 46. In my opinion (and it is the opinion of many other school board members I talk to) time would be more wisely spent if board members were gathering with other districts to discuss the creation of opportunities for students and the exploration of new ways to overcome financial challenges. Much of what S.122 does bring is more flexibility to the table, and I would like to speak to those points relevant to my district, but encourage the education committee to create more flexibility for districts. If you walk away from this testimony hearing only one thing, please hear this plea: To solve difficult problems you need creative solutions and creative solutions require freedom and flexibility:

1) As S.122 accurately states, the Marlboro School District, my district, is one of a few other districts that has *“operating or tuitioning models that differ among adjoining districts AND geographic isolation due to lengthy driving times or inhospitable travel routes between proposed merger partners.”* Marlboro is the **only** K-8 operating district in its Supervisory Union and our town voted resoundingly (264-66) NOT to change its operating structure to a K-6 with choice for Middle and High School. The vote, in my opinion, essentially came down to two important points:

- i) educational philosophy (many people value a K-8 structure as opposed to a separate middle school) and
- ii) geography; while we neighbor towns that have K-8 schools, those schools are not only horizontally distant, but *vertically distant* (around 1200 ft down to the east (via a state road, Rt. 9 – that incurs the most fatalities annually in VT) and 600 ft up to the west (via a dirt road that the school refuses to send busses down due to its grade and hazardous nature).

With these two points in mind, I would encourage the committee to seriously ponder districts like Marlboro. We are an extremely rural town, but still provide exceptional opportunities to our students.

Submitted by Douglas Korb, Chair
Marlboro School District
Resident - Marlboro, VT

We aim to prove these points to the State Board of Education in an Alternative Structure Proposal. However, we also recognize the State's desire to ensure schools are expanding opportunities and are already planning such expansions outside of our Supervisory Union.

2) As stated in Sec. 3, the three-by-one side-by-side structure amendments would greatly assist Marlboro in its path forward, but does not go far enough to create opportunity expansion. I would hope that the committee could explore ideas and language in the proposal that allows for districts like Marlboro to submit a proposal that provides exploration across districts. The Supervisory Union to which Marlboro is a part (Windham Central) is already well known for its collaboration and the merging of districts would do little for the region if we could not bring other districts on board (outside of our territory) for program expansion. The reality that Marlboro is a rural school and geographically isolated is clear; however, there is no reason that students in other districts could not benefit from our special programs (such as a biannual trip to Costa Rica for Spanish or science projects on Hogback Mountain). These are expansion ideas that Marlboro has specifically wished to explore with districts outside of our region and would hope that they would be given the same credence in an Alternative Structure proposal as the operating structure of a school is being given. Act 46 was written to create equity and opportunities, shouldn't that be first and foremost when considering a proposal? Not whether a town has changed its district to accommodate a "model" or "structure" outlined by the legislature?

Therefore, I request that the committee look very clearly at language and give the State Board of Education or Secretary of Education cloture in approving a governance structure, even if it does not fit into one of the models you have writ into law, should S.122 pass. There are many districts, like Marlboro, that will have to think creatively to expand opportunities, and creativity should be encouraged, not boxed in.