

House Education Committee
c/o Marjorie Zunder
Committee Assistant
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Re: S.122

Dear members of the House Education Committee:

Please consider this written testimony as it pertains to your deliberations on Senate Bill 122, relating to increased flexibility for school district mergers.

We have been members of the Dover Act 46 study committee, which recently concluded a nine-month study on a school district merger with Wardsboro and Marlboro. As you may know, the merger vote was approved in Dover, but was defeated by voters in Wardsboro and Marlboro.

Without going into specifics about the plan, we are writing to advise you of our current situation and in support of the Senate Bill 122, which in addresses some of the problems we are now facing in the aftermath of the failed merger vote.

Currently, Dover is in limbo. Despite the best efforts of our committee and voters, which resulted in a positive vote for the merger, we have no clear path forward and precious little time to devise an alternative plan.

Among the challenges we face are:

1. No straightforward path towards meeting the goals of Act 46, due to a lack of viable merger partners.
2. A lack of guidelines for an alternative structure.
3. Loss of small school grants and hold harmless support, even though voters in Dover supported the Act 46 district merger plan.
4. A looming deadline for submission of Act 46 alternative plans.
5. A general sense of "Act 46 fatigue" by board members, voters, parents, and the general public.
6. No sense of having control over the fate of Dover school, due to Act 46 authorizing the State Board of Education and AOE ultimate authority in consolidation via the "final plan."

Among the things we hope you'll consider while reviewing S.122, or in considering any additional legislation related to school district consolidation, are:

1. The bill offers recognition of districts in Dover's situation, that of having approved a merger while other potential partner districts did not. By recognizing that situation, the bill should offer solutions and guidance for Dover and similar districts.
2. The bill continues small school grants and hold harmless support for Dover and other districts where voters supported the Act 46 district merger plan.
3. The bill recognizes complications for implementation in various areas of the state, including those caused by geography, differences in operating models, debt, and other issues that complicate merging.
4. The bill offers flexibility in terms of operating structures, by adding more options for side-by-side and other plans.

5. The bill recognizes the difficulties faced by some districts and offers reasonable time extensions to work through them.
6. The bill extends deadlines for financial incentives for districts working in good faith to meet the requirements of Act 46.

Dover school board members are considering their options under Act 46, and, frankly, none of them are the best solution. Dover voters, parents, and taxpayers are also concerned about the potential loss of the financial incentives and of the weakening of Dover School, which continues to exceed state educational standards while maintaining a reasonable tax rate.

We ask you to look favorably on S.122, and perhaps to do even more to help Dover and other towns in the efforts to comply with Act 46, to maintain our community's identity, to give value to our taxpayers, and to educate our children in the best manner possible.

Sincerely

Randy Capitani,

Dover Act 46 Study Committee member

Richard Werner,

Chair, Dover School Board

Chair, Dover Act 46 Study Committee