

Rep. Heidi Scheuermann
H. 117 – State Board of Education
February 10, 2016

Thank you for inviting me in today to present to you H. 117.

As background, in May of 2012, Governor Peter Shumlin signed into law Act 98. This Act created an Agency of Education led by a Secretary. This Secretary would be appointed by the Governor, and responsible and accountable directly to the Governor.

Prior to that time, the State of Vermont had a Department of Education, over which there was a Commissioner who was appointed by the State Board of Education, and responsible and accountable to the State Board of Education.

But, in the same 2012 law, the legislature included a provision that precluded the Governor from actually having full decision-making authority over the choice of his/her Secretary. In fact, while the Secretary would serve at the pleasure of the Governor, report directly to the Governor, and be accountable directly to the Governor, the Governor would be required to choose a Secretary from a list of candidates provided to him/her by the State Board of Education.

This is not the case with any other Secretaries or Agencies, and in my view should not be the case with the Agency of Education. I believe strongly that it is imperative that Governor has the full authority to appoint his Cabinet, including the Secretary of Education.

For that reason, H. 117 eliminates the authority of the State Board to propose to the Governor candidates for office of Secretary of Education.

Hand in hand with that organizational change, H. 117 would also remove the authority of the State Board of Education to adopt rules, and transfer that rulemaking authority to the Agency of Education.

This provision, too, is critical to ensuring that the Agency of Education is a full and proper Agency of government, responsible for enacting changes in law and advancing the priorities of the Governor of the State of Vermont.

In a nutshell, this bill would provide greater flexibility for the Governor to select an Education Secretary who shares his/her vision; and it would provide greater accountability on education issues to Vermonters.

As Senator Brian Campion said once: “People can call the Governor for a lack of health care or over issues of transportation. They should also have a direct line on education issues.”