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To: House Education Committee  
From: Nicole L. Mace, Executive Director  
Re: Special Education Funding Bill – Draft 6.1  
Date: February 1, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Committee's special education funding bill.

As I indicated in my previous testimony on this topic, transitioning to a new funding model for special education must be accompanied by changes in special education practices, IEPs, and general education instruction. That work must be supported by an Agency of Education that has the staffing and resources necessary to provide ongoing technical assistance to districts.

The VSBA has had and continues to have concerns about staffing capacity at the Agency of Education. This bill does not increase the capacity at the Agency of Education to support changes in practice statewide.

Consensus indicates that, in order to be done well, this transition must occur over a five-year period. This bill moves to a census-based model in two school years. This is inconsistent with our recommendation that further analysis by practitioners and representatives from the AOE is essential prior to the adjusting the formula. This bill makes changes to the formula, the process for extraordinary cost reimbursement, and eliminates millions of dollars in resources to school districts without the examination and review required in order to understand which models and assumptions fit best in Vermont and the implications on the ground of such a shift. This includes the impact of moving to a census based model on small, rural districts.

Further study would also allow for thorough examination of the appropriate level of funding for a census model. No matter the source of funding, districts are obligated to provide the services called for in an IEP. A move to a census based model that decreased the special education allocation without a commensurate decrease in the need for services will push special education

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costs into local education spending. Under the current education funding formula, this would dramatically increase tax rates at the local level due to the rise of per pupil spending.

It is also difficult to comprehend how this bill could proceed at the same time as the Ways and Means Committee is considering significant changes to the education funding formula, to take effect in FY 2019. How will these two funding system changes interact with each other? Will current inequities between districts be exacerbated? The VSBA strongly believes that any adjustments to the education system – especially those impacting funding - must not exacerbate the current inequities in our system.

Eliminating funding that requires a shift in practice in order to ensure there is no impact on children may well work in districts that have strong, stable leadership, cohesive governance structures, educators with a commitment to evolving their practice, and parents working in partnership with the LEA to modify IEPs. What will happen in districts that do not have those assets? What safeguards are there in this bill to prevent harm to children, families, and communities?

The UVM and DMG reports provide us with a path to a better system for students and taxpayers, but we must ensure **we take the time** we need to plan a transition so that we avoid unintended consequences that undermine our commitments to ensure every student receives the resources and educational opportunities they need to learn and thrive.