

H.98, Not for Vermont

Amelia Charbonneau

January 21, 2018

Issue H.98 is attempting to address: There have been recent conflicts in communities over education professionals' contracts. The disruption in communities has been caused by strikes and impositions, which H.98 seeks to eliminate. However, rather than having the proclaimed effect H.98 would actually cause greater harm to Vermont.

Introduction: As many of you know South Burlington was one of the towns involved in the conflicts about negotiations. Due to this issue in my community, I was prompted to investigate the topic in depth. As a student and the daughter of a teacher in the district, this issue held great importance to me. Since the outset of the school year I have been working on a project that investigated the situation in South Burlington and H.98.

Approach: I spent the start of the 2017-2018 school year attending all events relating to the South Burlington contract negotiation situation. This entailed attending school board meetings and events hosted by the South Burlington Educators Association. When this was successfully resolved I moved on to my extensive investigation of H.98. This encompassed research of the bill and interviews with a multitude of stakeholders (ie: teacher union officials, school board members, local representatives).

Conclusion: After the completion of the investigation it became clear that if passed, H.98 would be detrimental to educators, students, families, and communities. This determination was come to because this bill creates no way to force education professionals and school boards to come to an agreement. This creates a dangerous situation in which they could never come to a resolution.. This would no doubt hurt the quality of teachers in Vermont, create increased animosity, and be detriment to all. This quite simply makes this bill unpassable.

Even if binding arbitration was included in this bill it would still not be viable. After the multitude of interviews a clear sentiment emerged: they would still not support the bill if it was amended to include binding arbitration. The reasoning cited was that the arbitrator was an individual from outside of the community. Power and responsibility would be taken away from the elected officials and educators.

Recommendation: The reason this bill was introduced was to address the issues strike and impositions created in communities, however, this is clearly not the way to do it. If legislators are concerned about this issue it would be most responsible that they make a decision that would not have such a drastic and negative impact on those in this state. The bill that best fits this requirement is H.557 introduced by Rep. LaLonde. Rather than completely dismantling the current process and creating a situation in which teachers could endlessly work without a contract, he offers small changes to the system to appropriately and more effectively address the issue of concern.