



A partnership between the VT Council of Developmental and Mental Health Services and the VT Care Network

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County

Upper Valley
Services

Washington
County Mental
Health Services

Testimony on S130

April 11, 2016

To the House Education Committee:

We represent a stakeholder group of 14 independent schools, run by the state's designated mental health agencies, who could be significantly impacted by changes to the independent school approval process. We request that representation from our schools be added to the Study Committee on independent school approval rules by adding the following language to Section 1(b):

(10) one representative of independent schools run by designated mental health agencies, who shall be chosen by Vermont Care Partners.

Our specialized educational programs are unique within the larger group of approximately 80 independent schools. There are 14 schools in our network, and they range in size from serving 5-90 students. Our schools provide therapeutic instruction to students whose social, emotional, or behavioral needs exceed what is available in public school settings. Decisions for placement into our schools are made by the referring school district through an IEP process, often informed by input from mental health providers and/or DCF teams, as well as families and educators. Unlike other independent schools, families do not enroll their children independently and do not pay private tuition. Enrollment decisions are made throughout the year and may not line up with the school calendar. Medicaid match is a primary source of funding for our schools.

Our schools are not members of the Vermont Independent School Association, and it would be a mistake to believe that they can represent all independent schools in the state. Our size, educational programming, and funding differ significantly from theirs. There are several areas in the recently proposed Rule 2200 in which the needs of our schools may differ from traditional independent schools. These include: policies around open enrollment; policies around financial auditing; policies around student health and safety; and the financial burdens of NEASC accreditation or AOE review.

For this reason, we think it would benefit the process for our specialized schools to have a seat at the table of the Study Committee on independent schools.

Please let us know if we can answer additional questions.

David Rice and Lisa Estivill, Choice Academy
Washington County Mental Health Services

Tammy Austin, chair
Children, Youth and Family Services Directors
Vermont Care Partners

137 Elm Street, N

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