

## Statement in Opposition to S.157

Senate Committee on Education

January 11, 2017

Martha Allen, President of Vermont-NEA

Good afternoon. I am Martha Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan who has taught in Vermont schools for over 30 years. I am also proud to represent 14,000 women and men in our state's schools as president of Vermont-NEA. I am here today to tell you why S.157 is an unnecessary intrusion into the relationship between local school boards, their local educators, and their local schools.

For more than 50 years, locally elected school board members have worked directly with the women and men in their schools to reach contract settlements more than 5,000 times. During that time, Vermont's schools rose from middle-of-the-pack nationally to become among the handful of school systems considered the nation's best. During that time, the caliber of professionals in our classrooms has improved, as teachers are able to dedicate careers to children while becoming financially secure.

To be sure, there have been hiccups along the road. But let's put it in perspective: over the course of 50 years and 5,000 contract settlements, boards have voted to impose terms of employment about two dozen times and teachers have gone on strike 27 times. The incidence of strikes comes to half of one percent of all negotiations. (About the same math applies to impositions made by boards.) In other words, both sides rarely – if ever – use their final steps in the collective bargaining process.

We have long opposed taking away the rights of unionized teachers to strike – as well as being opposed to stripping local school boards of their rights to impose terms of employment.

The fact that boards and teachers each have last-resort options is a matter of law. The teachers bargaining law is written to compel settlements at every stage. Very, very few negotiations end up even close to strikes or impositions of employment terms. And that's by design.

We fully understand the emotional reasons for trying to strip away these final tools. Strikes aren't pleasant, and impositions of employment terms do real long-term damage to the relationship between teachers and local school boards. But it is because both options are so dramatic that they are rarely used.

Indeed, we aren't alone in our opposition to S.157's principles: last week, the South Burlington School Board wrote to the legislature to register their opposition to stripping away teachers' right to strike. And this is a board that faced an imminent strike this fall, averted because both sides were able to reach a negotiated settlement.

At a time when assaults on working women and men are coming from all corners, it would be a grave disservice if this Legislature were to add to further erosions in the rights of working people. We know that the majority of lawmakers made it clear during last year's veto fight that they were unwilling to strip away collective bargaining rights from teachers. We hope that the same sentiment prevails again this year.

I have been a decades-long teacher in Vermont schools. I can tell you that for me and my colleagues, the ability to collectively bargain with our employers has made it easier for us to do what we all want to do: be our best for our students.

S.157 is a solution in search of a problem. We strongly oppose this measure, as we believe that collective bargaining has been an unmitigated success for our schools, our educators, and, most importantly, Vermont's students.

Thank you very much.