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TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: Senate Education Committee

FROM: Dr. Amy Fowler, Deputy Agency of Education

TOPIC: S. 233- A bill related to raising the minimum age for compulsory education

DATE: January 19, 2018

The Agency of Education supports all initiatives that encourage young people to remain engaged with their education and to remain in school until they have met the proficiencies that will enable them to fully contribute to Vermont's economic and civic communities and to provide for themselves and their families.

The Agency offers the following observations related to this bill:

1. **Efforts to engage youth:** The students who currently drop out of school before graduation in Vermont are typically students who have a range of other risk factors or ACES as is being discussed in other areas. These students are more typically living in poverty, have disabilities and are learning English. Myriad efforts related to improving interventions, supporting these students through Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and creating a more personalized school environment through Act 77 are all steps that are underway to help young people to see school as something they *want* to continue, not something they *have* to do.
2. **Hidden Expense:** Raising the minimum age for compulsory schooling is based on a premise that if families and young people wish to avoid interacting with the legal system, the family will ensure that the student attends school. Current statute § 1125-27 describe the requirements for schools, truant officers, grand jurors and the State's Attorney. This theory of action is only viable if the necessary resources to support increased demands on truancy officers and the courts.

With deference to our colleagues that work in the legal system, schools and AOE understand that they must triage their work to address issues of the greatest concern first – those that dramatically impact the safety of the community such as opioid related investigations, assault in any form, and crimes that harm others. Additionally, they must prioritize cases where youth are at risk in family court. With limited resources, the legal system currently does not address all cases brought forward by schools. Increasing the burden on the legal system without additional resources to support that increase will make this change symbolic with little impact on actual school engagement.

We suggest that the Committee request the testimony from the Attorney General and/or members of the [Justice for Children Task Force](#) to understand the impact on those the legal system prior to voting.