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TO: Chair Webb and Members of the House Education Committee
FROM: Dr. Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary, Agency of Education
DATE: January 24, 2019
RE: Testimony on H.3

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Agency of Education (AOE) appreciates and supports the Coalition's and this Committee's focus on ensuring equitable learning opportunities and educational experiences for all Vermont students. Indeed, as you heard from Secretary French two days ago when we jointly testified before you, the primary role of the AOE is to ensure quality and equity across our educational system statewide. We are supportive of this bill and would like to offer a few additional points for the Committee's consideration so as to improve the overall product.

Before highlighting these points for your consideration, however, I'd like to share with the committee just a few examples of the work that the AOE has undertaken in the context of our shared conversations on initial and current versions of H.3. Specifically:

1. We defined educational equity as an Agency and developed an Equity Lens Tool to guide our consideration of any legislation, policy, program or practice, as they pertain to the bolded group characteristics below.
 - a. AOE Definition: Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources, opportunities and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, whatever their **race, gender/identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, family background, or family income** may be. (*Adapted from CCSSO, Leading for Equity*)
 - b. Equity Lens Tool is available upon request.
2. As of August, 2018, we successfully completed the Supporting Educational Equity (SEE) project, with funding provided by CCSSO. AOE staff collaborated with a number of K-12 teachers around the state to ascertain what classroom level and systemic improvements were needed to fully leverage the equity-related changes in Vermont's ESSA state plan. Responses included many of the same themes and foci of H.3 (e.g., greater professional development opportunities for teachers; supports for helping teachers represent diverse perspectives when creating curricula, purchasing instructional materials, and designing their learning environments). The project also concluded with specific actions the AOE plans to take to address these recommendations. A full summary of the project is available upon request.

3. Ongoing work through SEA-level professional networks that focus on engendering educational equity
 - a. Evident in recent documents and technical guidance to the field: CTE Strategic Vision, Framework for Comprehensive and Equity School Supports, and mission/vision of the League of Innovative Schools

Again, I wanted to update the committee on some of the work that Agency staff are engaged in. They are very committed and excited about this ongoing work, we are proud of the work, and it is part of both regional and national conversations that we continue to participate in and lead.

Now for some additional notes regarding the current version of the bill:

1. Disaggregation of information by student groups

We want to be sure that the Committee is aware of the implications of disaggregation by student groups as identified in the bill. As you know, our state is somewhat unique in terms of the large number of small schools that comprise our education system. This has significant effects on what information can be reported at the student level, particularly for highly sensitive topics such as hazing, harassment, and bullying, and student academic performance, as specifically identified in the bill.

Because small school populations, especially when they are disaggregated into even smaller groups as is currently the case in Vermont for race/ethnicity and ELL status, make it easier for community members to identify who specific students are, federal and state regulations often do not allow public sharing of this information. It is actually why our approved ESSA state plan adopted a “super-group” category of historically marginalized youth so that we can better track and share accountability metrics even when specific student groups are quite small in size at the school level. Again, we just want to be sure the Committee is aware that, unless the federal metrics as just noted are used to meet H.3 requirements, you may be left with a table full of asterisks (i.e., suppressed information) for any given report.

2. Inclusion of students/families in distress

The AOE is supportive of this bill’s focus on equity for students from a variety of ethnic and social groups, as previously noted. It is important to highlight, however, that the bill’s current definition of social groups does not include students or individuals/families experiencing economic distress. We realize that the overarching focus of this work will be on racial and ethnic justice efforts, and do not wish to dilute that focus. However, we would be remiss to not point out that economic distress and disadvantage is a clear factor in many aspects of inequity within our statewide education system. For instance,

Common Data Project

New England Secondary School Consortium

Measure	Students with Disabilities	Students without Disabilities	Difference
4-Year High School Graduation (2015)*	76%	92%	-16%
6-Year High School Graduation (2015)**	83%	93%	-10%
High School Dropouts (2017)	15%	7%	8%
College Enrollment (2016)	18%	57%	-39%
College Persistence (2016)	73%	83%	-10%
College Completion (2011 class with completion by 2017)	36%	69%	-33%

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Common Data Project

New England Secondary School Consortium

Measure	Economically Disadvantaged (ED) Students	Non-ED Students	Difference
4-Year High School Graduation (2015)*	81%	96%	-15%
6-Year High School Graduation (2015)**	84%	97%	-13%
High School Dropouts (2017)	15%	3%	12%
College Enrollment (2016)	36%	58%	-22%
College Persistence (2016)	76%	85%	-9%
College Completion (2011 class with completion by 2017)	50%	74%	-24%

Common Data Project

New England Secondary School Consortium

Measure	ELL Students	Non-ELL Students	Difference
4-Year High School Graduation (2015)*	66%	90%	-24%
6-Year High School Graduation (2015)**	91%	91%	--
High School Dropouts (2017)	12%	8%	4%
College Enrollment (2016)	53%	52%	1%
College Persistence (2016)	65%	83%	-18%
College Completion (2011 class with completion by 2017)	Unable	to	Report

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Inclusion of an economic disadvantage factor would also align with the Agency's ESSA State Plan "super group" (discussed above) for data sharing purposes.

3. Statutes, SBE rules, and curriculum development

The Committee has already taken testimony from a variety of education experts on this bill, including representatives from the VSBA, VSA, VPA, and SBE. As others have noted, the authority and responsibility for curriculum development lies at the local level in Vermont. The SBE adopts state education standards and AOE's work in this area has typically framed such adoption requests on highly vetted, nationally benchmarked frameworks as of late. We echo recommendations that the work group review what has already been done in other states so that we are not necessarily "reinventing the wheel" here. In addition, we would also echo previous testimony that the real lever for the cultural shift we are all trying to achieve is not at the curriculum or standards level per se, but in instructional practice. We hope that this issue is considered in final deliberations on the bill.

4. Agency capacity for required work

Finally, we are concerned about the potential work load on the Agency as a result of passing H3. Although we support the intention and goals of the bill, given current federal and state demands we simply do not have sufficient staffing available to help the Advisory Group organize and collect the information required in order for this work to be successful.