

**Rep. Heidi Scheuermann**  
**Act 46 Legislative Working Group Letter – Request for an Extension of the July 1, 2019**  
**Involuntary Merger Deadline in Act 46 (H. 39 / H. 42)**  
**January 22, 2019**

Thank you for inviting me in today to present to you this letter from our Act 46 Legislative Working Group.

As introduction, as you will note from the letter, our working group represents a broad coalition of legislators from both the House and Senate, and from all across the political spectrum. We have come together, however, because our communities are in very precarious situations with regard to orders from the State Board of Education to merge school districts in just a matter of weeks.

While many of us have concerns about the involuntary mergers in general in Act 46, our sole request at this time is that the Legislature advance either one-year extension of such mergers (to July 1, 2020), or a moratorium on the forced mergers until the lawsuits are adjudicated.

The communities our group of legislators represent are all in very different situations and at various points in the merger process, but we all believe strongly that in order to ensure confidence in both the law and the process, it is imperative that we be given more time.

First, given the three lawsuits in process right now, it is absolutely critical that we allow some time for the courts to weigh in. While I am not too familiar with two of the lawsuits, I believe strongly that the EMUU-Stowe lawsuit against the state is a very strong one. And, if we are required to merge, and that merger is followed by a decision in our favor, it will be virtually impossible to unravel the newly merged district. For that reason, it is important we allow time for the court to determine the validity of the decision by the State Board of Education to merge our districts.

Second, the merger of two districts, especially coming on the heels of a so recently merged district (Morristown and Elmore), takes time to do well, and to do right. We have two very strong, capable school boards, both of which have the best interests of all of our students at heart. A shotgun merger will do an incredible disservice to those exact students. I am confident our hard-working school boards can do this work well, but they deserve to be given proper time to put a merger together in a way that makes sense for all of our students and our dedicated faculty.

In addition, it is important that as we move forward with a merger, our communities understand precisely the process, what a merged district will look like, and how a merged district will specifically work. As someone who has a great deal of experience trying to engage families and communities on issues of importance, I can assure you that to do this right, this process will take significant time. I can also assure you that if our communities do not understand what is happening, and don't have time to digest this incredible change, we will find even more disillusionment and frustration with government than we see now.

Thank you again for your consideration of this request, and for inviting me to present the Working Group letter. We are ready to assist you in any way we can to ensure this proposal advances and passes in a timely manner.