

My name is Alder Donovan-Cook. I am a student of the Walden Project at Vergennes Union High School. For the past year and a half, I have served as a student representative on the Addison Northwest Supervisory District School board. Through this office I have spoken to the needs of students, providing the much needed context of the real, life-changing impact of the decisions being made. I have also exercised my voice in other, less official ways. This past spring, in response to sweeping changes to the structure of our school that had been made without any opportunity for the main stakeholders in the changes, my fellow students, to voice their concerns and opinions in any meaningful way, I called for a walkout. In all honesty, I expected me and my few co-conspirators to be the only ones to leave. I thought the fear of repercussions would frighten people away. Thankfully, I was wrong. Over a third of all the students in my school were prepared to face down our

principals, our teachers, and the chief of police. They were uncompromising in their desire to make their voices heard. I learned an important lesson that day; that I was not the exception to the rule, that young people everywhere care fiercely about how they deserve a seat at the table. As young people, we are constantly told to sit down, hold our thoughts to ourselves, and to not question those older than us. Young people's minds are learning who they are and how they relate to their society and their community. How can we expect people who are told that their voice doesn't matter for the wealth of their formative years to contribute to a functioning democracy? Student voice is of paramount importance not just to the youths of today, but to the future of our state and our nation. For the sake of the future leaders of tomorrow Addie, myself, and the youth of our Green Mountain state urge you to pass bill H-775.