

## ACT 46 TESTIMONY

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I can only speak for the Woodbury School Board, but we believe a delay in Act 46 implementation is not only prudent but necessary.

As recently as last November, when the preliminary State Board report was issued, we, and the rest of the districts in Orleans Southwest, were told we did not have to merge. I believe there was a good reason for this. All the districts had met with then Secretary Rebecca Holcombe in the summer. We explained how we were working together and believed we could integrate and improve services and achieve the goals of Act 46 without merging. She seemed very interested in what we were doing. We also testified to the same effect before the State Board in the fall.

So imagine our surprise when in the middle of November we were told we did have to merge. Our districts really had not done the basic work necessary for a successful merger.

I know a little bit about managing large organizations and organizational change. I worked in state government for 29 years and was the commissioner of two departments (DAIL for seven years and DMH after Irene), and also the Deputy Secretary for AHS for four years. I was the commission of DAIL during the re-organization of AHS early in the Douglas administration. The re-organization of DAIL is the only part of the AHS re-organization still in place. Why? Because we did it right.

Merging districts in OSSU will be challenging. There are a number of issues that will take time to work through. They include the budget, the articles of agreement, the new board, and debt. While we have started this work, I don't see any way we complete it in a positive way by July 1.

Many people in the OSSU districts are at best discouraged, and at worst angry. They feel that the forced merger will accomplish little and only create conflict that will linger for years. There certainly will not be any savings, unless one or two of the small schools close, which will be extremely difficult for all involved. In my opinion it is going to take hard work to bring everyone on board and working together and avoid rancor.

I see no harm in waiting to ensure a more successful merger. Perhaps a full year is not necessary and I believe we would be open to less time. But if we do not extend the deadlines, then we will rush and make bad decisions, and we will spend years trying to mend the damage.

Questions re: Act 39

1. Extending the date for changing articles to July 1 helps but may not be enough time.
2. Not clear about the provision for the union budget by June 30. If we are not merged by then, why would there be a merged budget? I recommend next year's budget be the merged one. That will give us time to establish savings through consolidation.

