

**Testimony to the Senate Education Committee by:
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Thank you for inviting me here today to testify. My name is Kathleen Barron and I am the Director of Finance & Accounting for the Essex Westford School District (EWSD). Chittenden Central Supervisory Union (CCSU) and the Essex Town School District officially merged on July 1, 2017 as EWSD. I was the Director of Finance & Accounting for CCSU for 19 years and now under the newly formed EWSD. My total accounting experience is over 35 years of which more than half has been in governmental accounting. I have implemented multiple software systems from paper processes to electronic.

As long-serving administrative veterans of our State's educational system, EWSD is in full agreement of the need and value such a state-wide financial system will ultimately bring as well as the uniformed chart of accounts. We were one of the first districts to pledge our support and participation: "first in, all in."

While still in full support of this goal, and certainly the overall vision, we have been evaluating and reflecting on the ability to successfully go live on eFinancePlus (eFP) for July 1, 2019 - as a district, and even as a State. In particular, we believed we needed to defer for at least one year so that we may take this major step with the greatest possible assurance of success and conveyed this in a letter to CFO Emily Byrne on April 3rd. Our readiness, along with the readiness of the uniform chart of accounts, common documented business processes, and eFinancePlus, particularly the HR elements, seem reasonably in question at the moment.

We can speak to the issue of readiness from some very clear and recent experience. In July 2017, we began the challenging process of a merger between Chittenden Central Supervisory Union and Essex Town School District; hiring new administrative leaders, combining business processes, and creating a single financial/HR system. In a very accelerated and under-resourced timeline, we needed to conduct business while implementing an unfamiliar software package, Tyler's Infinite Visions Enterprise Edition (IVEE). With only four months to migrate two large entities onto the selected software, moving from a customized system into one that had a very different format, we stressed our system and exhausted our employees to the breaking point and still were unable to completely go live. For the last year, we've operated our HR/Payroll processes in IVEE and all of our General Ledger processes in PowerSchool BusinessPlus. We stayed on two systems in anticipation of the State's system. The similarities of the eFP project and our IVEE project of two years ago are substantial, leading us to conclude we're not ready to repeat our recent past.

This is not my first RFP process. In 2003, CCSU and Essex Town worked together to choose a financial system that was a fully integrated finance and human resource product. We spent months reviewing and interviewing perspective vendors. We chose a PowerSchool product called BusinessPlus. It was a highly customizable solution that allowed us to use one database for four separate entities. It took us two years to implement and has been our software system since 2005. We had on site vendor support over those two years which allowed us to create business

processes and minimize impact to our end users. We finished on time and on budget. My point is that a major undertaking such as we are facing with a state-wide system cannot be rushed. We need more on site vendor support as well as potential beta sites of varying complexities to test and evaluate it readiness and success.

We are now a merged district that is responsible for over \$96 million in revenues in all funds and we will have to take many business processes that we have developed and create workarounds or alternative processes to accommodate a more "one size fits all" software product. As you can see, we are not a small organization with many challenges like many of our counterparts. Is it do-able? Probably, but the key component is time.

With the challenges of the Act 46 merger, integrating two student information systems into one, a new SLDS, and a new grant's management system, our district is experiencing "system fatigue." My position in supporting the delay of the mandated timeline for the UCOA and the SSDMS will allow the AOE, PowerSchool and, with the collaboration of the many experienced business managers, more time to create a successful product for now and well into the future. It will allow our organization the opportunity to create a system that is sustainable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.