

Mr. Chair, Vice Chair Ingram, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 274. I'm Pallas Ziporyn. I'm the daughter of Terra Ziporyn Snider and a resident of South Burlington.

I'm the Project Manager for Sleep 101 and Let's Sleep! CA at Brigham & Women's Hospital's Sleep Matters Initiative.

The Sleep Matters Initiative is the sleep education arm of the Division of Sleep & Circadian Disorders, and I am responsible for our high school and college-based sleep education initiatives. Our signature program, Sleep 101, is an award-winning sleep education program for high school and college students that has been used across the country at schools such as Harvard University, MIT, UCLA, Stuyvesant, Mass Academy, and Thomas Jefferson High School in Fairfax County, Virginia, and even right here in Vermont at Middlebury. We have recently launched a new initiative, Let's Sleep! CA that provides sleep education materials to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members in communities across the state of California to support the rollout of the Start School Later Law passed in October.

I'm also the Chapter Leader for Start School Later Vermont. I have two young children, ages 4 and almost 2, who will be starting public school in South Burlington in the next couple of years.

All parents want their children to be healthy and safe, but without Senate Bill 274, thousands of Vermont children will continue to be forced by local school mandate to wake up at times that pediatricians and scientists have proven to be unhealthy and unsafe.

Here in Vermont, the average high school starts at 8:06 a.m. Our average start time is EARLIER than in the state of California, a state that finally woke up to harm being caused to millions of children and just passed a law requiring high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m., the minimum earliest time recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC, and the American Medical Association.

Students in Vermont are especially harmed due to early school start times. In many Vermont districts, students are traveling long distances to get to school. In rural areas, many students have come to expect long bus rides. In other cases, students do not have a local high school and travel to other parts of the state.

In South Burlington, where I live, dozens of students travel daily from Grand Isle County, where there is no high school, often commuting 40 or more minutes to get to school. This is a very common story in Vermont.

When the first bell rings at Vermont's average time of 8:06 a.m., students have often been up for hours. In order to get ready and take a long commute, students often need to be up by 6:00 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. – and sometimes much earlier. With these constraints, it is biologically impossible for most students to get sufficient sleep.

Let's do the math. Sleep experts recommend that the average teen needs approximately 9 hours of sleep per night. If a student has to be up by 6:00 a.m., they would need to be asleep by 9:00 p.m. And yet, at puberty, kids' body clocks shift making it harder for them to fall asleep until close to 11 p.m. Waking a 16-year-old at 6:30 a.m. is the equivalent of waking a 40-year-old at 4:30 a.m.

As you just heard from my mother, the truth is that most teens are sleep deprived with 75% of US teens not even getting 8 hours per night. Some blame smartphones and poor time management skills, but the data suggests otherwise.

The disturbing reality is that the **Vermont public education system is the primary cause of a public health epidemic.**

The data also shows that it is the wake time – not the bed time- that is driving this epidemic. I am passing out a chart that shows the results of a study of 29,635 students from 362 schools across Canada. The students from schools that started later slept longer than those that started earlier. As you can see, there is a clear and direct linear relationship. I will also note that this study was conducted in Canada, where it is almost unheard of for any high school to start before 8:00 a.m. and many start at 9 a.m. or even 9:30 a.m.

The bottom line is this: when school starts later, students get more sleep.

When districts mandate that students make it to school at 8:06 a.m., they are directly responsible for dozens of downstream effects on students and their communities. We are stifling students' academic potential, increasing the rates of car crashes, creating higher rates of depression, and raising the risk of substance abuse. The list goes on and on. It is time for the state to step up.

Some have argued that this is a local issue. And yet, many aspects of school policy are regulated by state and federal government, particularly when local districts cannot or will not set policies to protect basic rights, including rights to health, safety, and education.

Establishing a barebones minimum before which schools should not begin mandated instruction is as fundamental as requiring schools to turn on the heat when the temperature falls below a certain level. The idea of setting a minimum standard is simply to provide a boundary to protect children from being forced to adhere to school starts that negatively impact their health and safety.

Starting school at later, safe, healthy hours is universally beneficial to all children. This is along the same vein as Child Labor Laws and Child Car Seat Restraint Laws. States already regulate the number of days per year students must attend school, how many hours a day they must be in class, and even start and finish dates for the school year.

Because many school districts have competing interests, such as cutting costs, politics, and logistics, they have not always put the safety and welfare of children as the utmost priority. Furthermore, some of the barriers to change disappear when there is system-wide coordination, like the common local objection that pushing back school start times will make scheduling sports games difficult with the neighboring districts.

Vermont has the opportunity to be a leader in paving the way for the rest of the country, following California's footsteps.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 274 and take this crucial step in protecting Vermont children and their communities.

Thank you for your time.