

House Committee on Education

April 13, 2021

Testimony on S. 115 – An act relating to making miscellaneous changes in education laws

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Good morning, Chair Webb and the House Committee on Education. Thank you for inviting me to provide testimony this morning. I have a few prepared statements and then am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The City of Winooski supports S.115, and specifically the provision related to “cultural liaisons,” as before you. This legislation would support:

- Winooski’s community-wide efforts to provide educational and municipal services in culturally appropriate ways
- Would allow us to expand the ways in which we provide services to all community members
- And would ensure that all voices are heard at the leadership table – and have access to the leadership table.

Winooski is special. We are the only majority/minority school district in the state. We are a single Municipality/School district. 18% of our residents were born in another country. The community has been a welcoming community for decades – open to new neighbors and see our diversity as among are most significant strategic advantages.

Our ability to partner and jointly fund our Community Liaisons first emerged as a priority at a 2018 Equity Summit held with formal and informal leaders from across our city, school, and partner organizations. Since that time, this concept has garnered additional support and this winter Winooski was awarded a Working Communities Challenge Grant from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston to expand these roles. The City Council has adopted a sustainability plan to fund the expansion of these position beyond the life of this grant. With this enabling legislation, we are poised to model for other communities how to efficiently and effectively deliver services in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way and to ensure that the people making community decisions accurately reflect the demographics of our community.

Expanding these roles – and supporting them with dollars beyond education funds – would allow us to:

- Maximize our resources to best serve our community
- Efficiently provide services in the least confusing way possible
- Create livable wage jobs



- Expand positions to full-year for folks who are absolutely essential to our growth as a community.

Through COVID, this need has become more and more apparent. Whose role is it to get out accurate information about COVID precautions? To communicate the importance of isolation and quarantine? To inform neighbors about opportunities for vaccination? **All of ours!** A similar thing can be said for things like housing access, unemployment, child care, and public safety support. Clearly all of these factors impact how our children show up to school and to what extent they are ready to learn. And they are critical to the healthy function of our municipality and community. Being able to share resources to provide these services only makes sense and will strengthen our community.

Thank you for your time this morning.

