

Testimony Feb 1, 2022

My name is James Warnock and I am here as a representative of the Lincoln Save Community Schools group. I come before you also as a career long educator in Vermont serving as a teacher, staff developer, principal and assistant superintendent of schools for the city of Burlington. For the past 20 years I have worked both nationally and internationally as a consultant with the Boston-based consulting and training organization, Research for Better Teaching.

Let me begin by thanking you for this opportunity and stating for the record that the town of Lincoln has acted in **good faith** to follow the withdrawal process as outlined in current law.

As you consider potential updates to the process for withdrawing from a Unified District, we presume-- **in the same spirit of good faith**-- that the Committee shares our view that towns such as ours should be allowed to complete the withdrawal process as outlined in current law.

Throughout our journey we have been committed to a process that is grounded in respect, transparency, and open dialogue with our town and neighboring District communities as well as with the MAUSD administration and Board.

I'd like to share with the Committee some of the highlights of this journey, as well as observations and insights that could help inform your understanding of the withdrawal process from the perspective of a withdrawing town.

And it is our hope that this journey and the countless Vermonters in our town and in our district actively engaged in it will confirm for this committee that **applying this new law retroactively** would be a violation of public trust.

The decision to withdraw was not a capricious, emotional act but a deeply discussed, difficult and carefully researched response to the

very real possibility of losing our elementary school to closure or some form of repurposing.

And so we began some 13 months ago working to understand the complexity and nuances of the withdrawal process as allowed for in 16 V.S.A. § 724 and the Act 46 consolidation agreement.

The Lincoln Selectboard spent time listening to the concerns of Lincoln parents, community members and educators through well attended and lively virtual sessions.

In advance of the scheduled town vote established by a petition signed by 10% of town voters our group sponsored three informational meetings so organizers of the effort could explain their reasoning for wanting to withdraw.

We debated the impact withdrawing would have on Lincoln students. A member of the Selectboard led the effort to calculate the tax impact on taxpayers. We did this so our town would have realistic and unbiased calculations for determining the tax impact to taxpayers.

We had multiple conversations with the MAUSD Superintendent, Business Manager and Board. We have talked with other unified districts and supervisory districts.

After all of this impact assessment and extensive, sustained, and inclusive community engagement, Lincoln community members voted decisively in August 2021 to become an independent public school district by a vote of 525 to 172.

The next step in this process is for the other towns of MAUSD - Bristol, Monkton, New Haven, and Starksboro - to ratify Lincoln's decision by a simple majority vote. This vote will take place within each town's town meeting day this coming March.

The over 6 month delay in holding this ratification vote is due directly to the current law's lack of clarity on both time frame and who in each of the towns is responsible for coordinating the multi-town vote.

And should we be fortunate enough to receive the ratification from our fellow district towns, we look forward to discussions with the State Board of Education in the near future.

Let me close by again stating that any legislation on withdrawal cannot have retroactive application to a Town already in the process with reliance on the existing statutes. To enforce retroactive application would truly reverberate throughout our state as a clear violation of public trust.