

Good morning and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak to the Committee regarding revision of bill draft 22-0275. I am Sherry Sousa, Superintendent of Windsor Central Supervisory Union. This is my second year serving in this role, after serving 7 years as the Director of Student Support Services, and 20 years as a building based administrator and special education teacher in this district.

In my role as Director of Student Support Services, I was a member of the WCSU Act 46 Committee. I participated in 31 meetings, from July of 2015 to January of 2017, of a ten member group. I am very familiar with the extensive deliberations, negotiations, and debate needed to form a merged district. I am also well aware of the positive impact of those decisions.

Prior to the merger, WCSU contained six individual districts with different instructional programs, student assessments, teacher evaluation systems, calendars, schedules, contracts and administrative support systems. As a middle and high school special educator, I witnessed how varied educational experiences impacted students entering our seventh grade academically and emotionally. The variability of student skills and maturity meant that their first years in middle school focused on addressing academic weaknesses, or waiting for others to catch up, rather than building on foundational skills.

In the years since the merger, I have witnessed what can happen when schools come together to ensure that all students have access to high quality equitable learning. Students benefit when all teachers have a deep knowledge base, opportunities to collaborate, and access to similar resources. Principals are able to be educational leaders when they are not distracted by building issues, food service challenges and technology limitations. They can be in classrooms and supporting instruction when they are not attending to these peripheral needs. Teachers feel valued when they have similar benefits, salary grid and professional development.

Windsor Central Supervisory Union is stronger as a whole when working together. This is reflected in our improved student outcomes, increased opportunities inside and outside our classrooms, and our shared vision of a graduate of our district..

When I consider the revision of bill draft 22-0275, I am most concerned that so few individuals could have such an impact on the resources of our district. Five percent of the voters in one of my seven towns could distract from the powerful work and focus of a thriving district. One issue, concern, or uninformed message could risk the positive educational outcomes of not just the students of that town but of the six others. Three individuals, forming a Withdrawal Study Committee, would have the authority to require the Central Office team to provide the documentation necessary to support withdrawal of a district. The School Board would need to appoint a subcommittee to act as liaison with the three Withdrawal Committee members. The Superintendent would need to schedule and participate in these meetings.

The challenges that merged districts are currently facing require the full attention of our Boards, administration and faculty. I am in strong favor of accountability to our community members, and if a substantial number of voters petition with concerns, then they should have the authority to access the resources of our Board and Central Office. I believe that such a small representation of

a town however, should not be able to force their will on the educational outcomes of all our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns with you today.