



P.O. Box 130, 80 Main Street, Richford, Vermont 05476
Tel: (802) 848-7661/Fax: (802) 848-3531
www.fnesu.org
Lynn Cota, Superintendent

February 2, 2021

To the Members of the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs:

We are writing to ask you to support H.63, an act relating to statewide public school employee health benefits. Our understanding is you are currently reviewing this bill in comparison with H.81.

One of the major differences, and benefits, is that H.63 requires the arbiters to *consider* costs in their deliberations when the two sides can't agree. When benefits were negotiated at the local level, boards and administration always had to consider costs, and weigh increases in healthcare costs against other budget priorities.

After teacher salaries and high school tuition, healthcare costs are the biggest single piece of our budgets, between 8-13% of our total budget across our districts. For every four dollars we spend on staff salary, we spend one dollar on healthcare costs.

As these costs continue to rise, our School Boards are faced with difficult decisions involving programming and opportunities for students. These healthcare increases have a significant impact on the spending plan that is ultimately presented to voters each year.

If the arbitration process is not allowed to consider cost as a significant factor in comparing proposals, there will never be an incentive for the employee commissioners to come to a negotiated agreement, and healthcare will continue to push education costs higher.

Sincerely,

Polly Rico
Board Chair
Enosburgh-Richford UUSD

Jean Marie Clark
Board Chair
Northern Mountain Valley UUSD

Mary Niles
Board Chair
Franklin Northeast SU

Lynn Cota
Superintendent

Morgan Daybell
Business Manager

cc: Rep. James Gregoire
Rep. Paul Martin
Rep Felisha Leffler
Rep. Robert Norris
Rep. Brian Savage