



**STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

TO: Rep. Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, Chair of the House Government Operations Committee, Rep. John Gannon, Vice Chair, and members of the House Government Operations Committee

CC: Omar Smith, Readsboro Board of Civil Authority, Andrew McLean, Dover Town Clerk

FROM: Representative Laura Sibilia, Dover, Readsboro, Searsburg, Somerset, Stamford, Wardsboro, Whitingham

DATE: February 17th, 2022

RE: Testimony on behalf of Readsboro and Dover Boards of Civil Authority

*The purpose of this memo is to provide additional testimony in support of the towns of Readsboro and Dover related to their requests on apportionment. This testimony is intended to provide the committee with information about:

1. Description of the towns in the current Windham-Bennington and Windham-6 Districts
2. Rep. Sibilia's understanding of the apportionment process
3. The processes the towns in the Windham/Bennington district were advised to undertake in responding to the LAB and the HGO Committee
4. Problems with the HGO plan
5. Problems that members of the committee have articulated to the Windham/Bennington Representative that they are trying to resolve

1. Description of the towns in the Windham-Bennington and Windham-6 Districts

The towns in the Windham-Bennington and Windham-6 districts make up what is known as the Deerfield Valley. They are tourism centered towns surrounding the Mount Snow and Haystack resorts. The towns are arranged along the Deerfield Valley in the [Deerfield Valley river shed](https://deerfieldriver.org/)¹ – on the eastern slopes of the Green Mountains. They are bisected by route 100 and Route 9. The representatives of the Windham/Bennington District and the Windham-6 District have regular meetings with the Vermont Department of Transportation about Route 9 – the main route to Bennington and Route 7 and Brattleboro and route 91 – because the road becomes treacherous and frequently closes in the winter. The towns in these two districts are isolated together from the larger towns in Southern Vermont. These two districts which encompass the Deerfield Valley towns have 8732 people and two representatives. The towns have almost all maintained or grown population. $8732/4287= 2.0$ representatives. The citizens in the two districts of this isolated tourism centered valley have just the right number of representatives.

If the Windham/Bennington District and the Windham-6 District had lost population, the places to push district lines would be to the east into Marlboro along Route 9, and the West River towns of Newfane, Townshend and

¹ <https://deerfieldriver.org/general-1>

Jamaica along route 30. This is the direction of mutual aid and the remaining towns of the two supervisory unions that Windham/Bennington and Windham 6 belong to.

The isolated Deerfield Valley towns in the Windham/Bennington District and the Windham-6 District did not lose population.

2. Rep. Sibilias's POV on the apportionment process

The towns that I represent are the legislative district. **It is not my district.** It is not any of the parties district. It is not the legislature's district. It is the people's district. The people's interest is in electing from amongst themselves a representative to represent their interests in their government.

I believe there should be an independent redistricting committee - not the legislature - and political parties should not be allowed to choose their districts or protect incumbents. These are the people's districts. I have sponsored legislation in this and other biennium to make that a reality.

My year round work is in economic development across Southern Vermont in both Windham and Bennington Counties. The focus of that work for the past decade has been on the long slow population decline from 1990-2010. That decline continues in Bennington/Pownal and Westminster/Rockingham. Along the spine of the Deerfield and West Rivers, [population has stabilized and grown.](#)² That is consistent with overall Vermont settlement patterns we are seeing outside of the Chittenden and Franklin County areas – older industrial centers along the river and NY border are seeing declining population while rural towns, especially those adjacent to resort areas, have been increasing in population. When your region is seeing declining population, you should lose representation. When your region is increasing population, you should see increased representation.

3. The processes the towns in the Windham/Bennington district were advised to undertake in responding to the LAB and the HGO Committee

Every town was asked to let me know if they approved of the maps or disputed them. If the town doesn't have a problem, the map is fine with me.

The BCA in the towns of Dover, Readsboro, Searsburg, Somerset, Stamford, Wardsboro, Whitingham were all advised by their state representative of how to follow along with the LAB, and that they should provide comment on the maps from the LAB and from HGO, as well as the relationships they have with their neighboring towns to those committees. [Dover and Stamford provided commentary to the LAB.](#)³

The BCA in the towns of Dover, Readsboro, Searsburg, Somerset, Stamford, Wardsboro, Whitingham were all advised how to follow along with the HGO Process, and that they should provide comment on the maps from the LAB and from HGO, as well as the relationships they have with their neighboring towns to those committees. Readsboro and Dover provided testimony to the HGO about the initial maps that HGO proposed which split the current Windham/Bennington District in two. The Readsboro and Dover BCAS have provided substantial testimony to assist the committees which can be found at the end of this testimony.

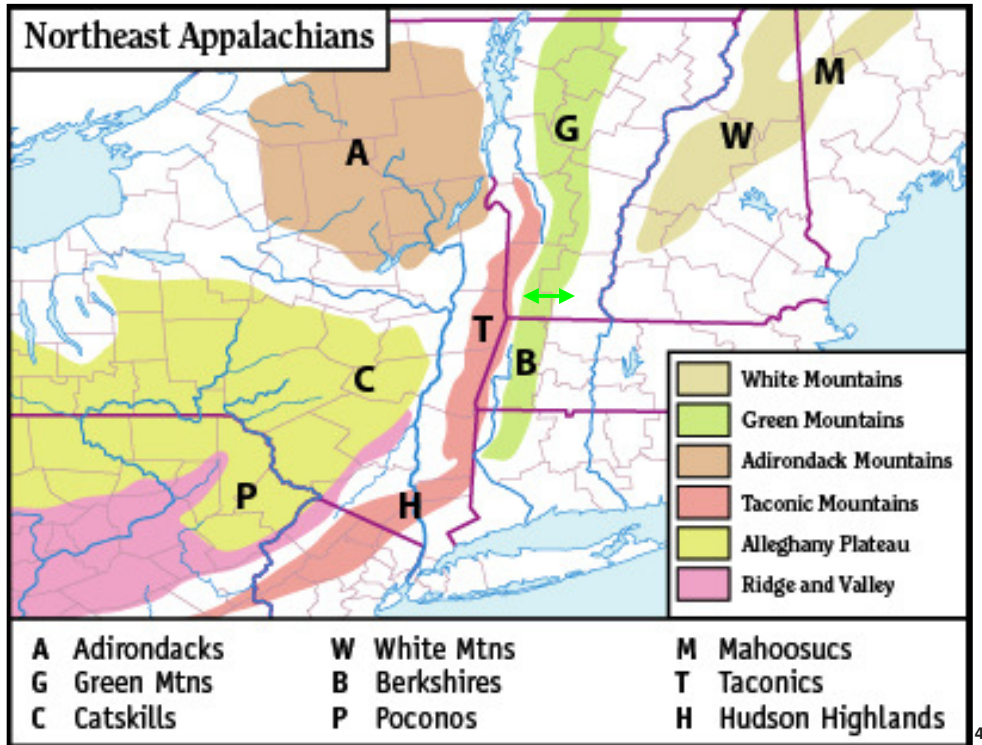
² <https://vcgi.vermont.gov/data-release/2020-census-data>

³ <https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/sos/Services/LAB/BCA%20House%20Redistricting%20Feedback%20Report%20as%20of%2011.16.2021.pdf>

4. Problems with the HGO plan

There are two **big** problems with the HGO plan in addition to the substantial issues that the Readsboro and Dover BCA's have articulated.

1. The HGO plan pulls two towns out of the isolated Deerfield Valley towns in the Windham/Bennington District and the Windham-6 District and puts them in a district...**on the other side of the southern Green Mountains.**
2. The comments in #6 below.



6. Problems that members of the committee have articulated to the Windham/Bennington Representative that they are trying to resolve

The following is a list of problems that the current Windham-Bennington representative has been given regarding the HGO splitting of the Windham Bennington district and the rationale for the potential disenfranchisement of the voters of Stamford and Readsboro.

- "There is a problem in Bennington."
- "There is an incumbent problem in Bennington." While I was explaining that Readsboro was in jeopardy of being disenfranchised.
- "We have a situation which could put two incumbents up against one another." While I was explaining that Readsboro was in jeopardy of being disenfranchised.
- "If this was your hometown we would understand." While I was explaining that Readsboro was in jeopardy of being disenfranchised.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Mountains#/media/File:NortheastAppalachiansMap.jpg

- “Here is your new district.” Handed a map of the proposed northern part of the split Windham-Bennington District. Explained that I represent the Windham Bennington District and needed to see the maps for all the towns I currently represent.

Suggestions:

1. Population has dropped all along the Route 7 corridor and increased at the top of the Windham/Bennington/Windsor District. Shift up from the over represented towns on the Route 7 MA line along the valleys till you hit the districts that are underrepresented on the Rutland/Windsor County line. That will keep communities and neighbors connected.
2. Please leave Windham/Bennington intact as has been reasonably requested.
3. Create a two person district with Windham 6 and the Windham/Bennington District.
4. Please do not pluck random rural towns and drag them over the beautiful 2100 foot Green peaks to protect legislative seats in towns that are 25 times larger.

Windham – Bennington District Feedback on the LAB Maps

- Stamford LAB Feedback:
 - Rationale and comments: After careful review, the Board of Civil Authority does not support the change to move Stamford from the Windham-Bennington Representative District to form a new district with Pownal, the New Bennington-1 District. The board cited several reasons, as follows:
 - 1) The board questioned the equitable representation since Stamford has 861 people and Pownal has 3,258 people, according to the 2020 census. Pownal having almost four times Stamford’s population could be the primary vote, which could, in effect, minimize our town’s voice and concerns.
 - 2) Stamford does not have much in common with Pownal. For instance, we are separated geographically by a mountain range and there is no road connecting Stamford to Pownal. The quickest way to reach Pownal is to travel through Massachusetts and around.
 - 3) Stamford is the last Vermont town before entering Massachusetts. We are connected geographically by Route 100 to Readsboro. Since this route is our main connection to other towns in the state, separating us from Readsboro would essentially isolate us from the rest of the state.
 - 4) Stamford and Readsboro share the same school supervisory union. The new proposal would create a legislative district with two separate school supervisory unions.
 - The Stamford Board of Civil Authority acknowledges that the legislative board is guided by three statutory directives, in addition to the overall deviation:
 - 1, preservation of existing political subdivision lines,
 - 2, recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties and common interests, and
 - 3, use of compact and contiguous territory. The districts should be based on population, geographic proximity and economic reliance.

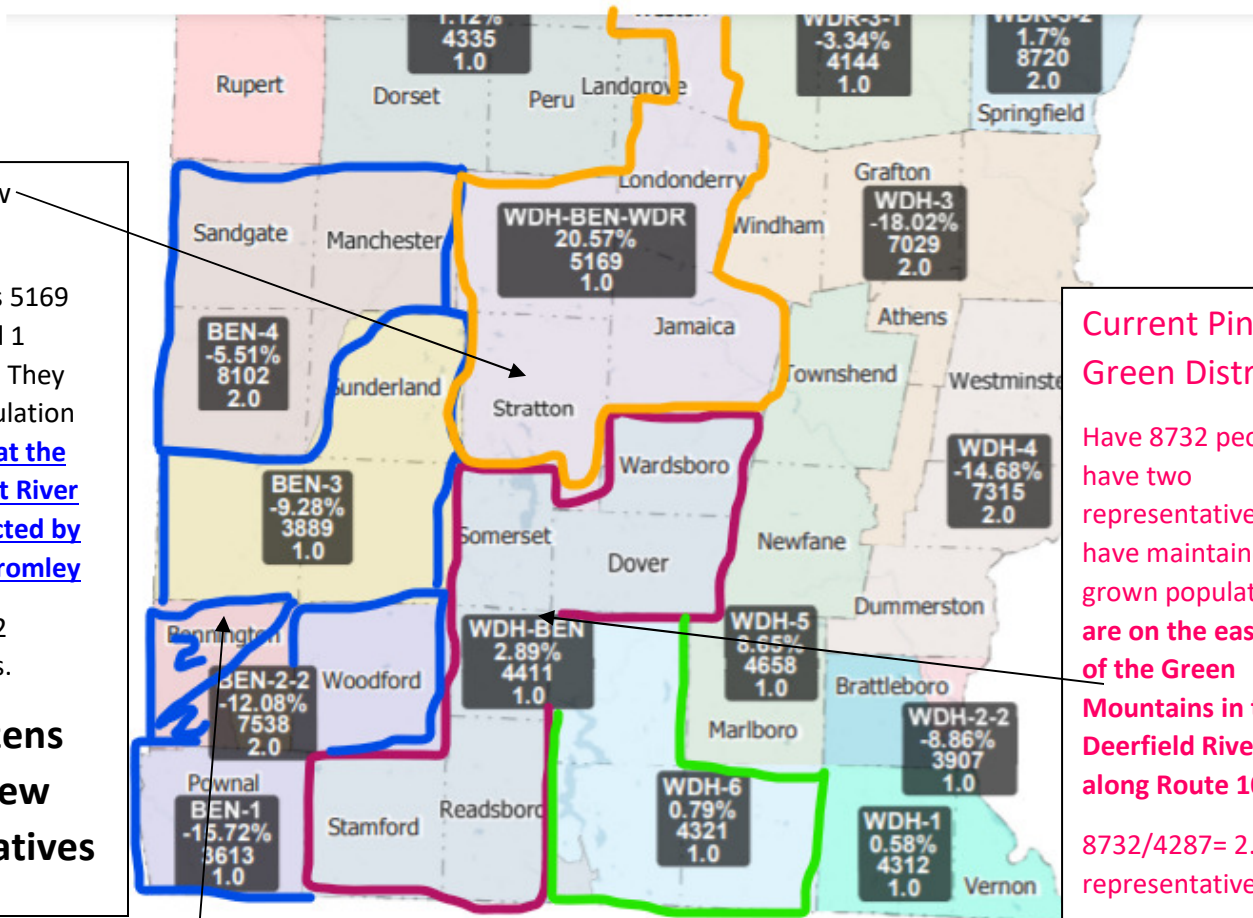
- Although the proposal seems to provide less deviation, the Board of Civil Authority sees no advantage to a grouping with Pownal. Because of the mountainous region and the many connections Stamford has with Readsboro, **the Board of Civil Authority rejects the proposal to create a new district with Pownal and believes it is in the town's best interest to remain in a district connected with Readsboro.**
- **Dover LAB Feedback**
 - **BEN-WDM-1 Our district is working well. Our people have similar concerns. We are rural, mountain towns with internet and cell coverage concerns, per pupil weighting concerns, low paying service industry job concerns, and affordable housing concerns that are not shared by our neighbors in more populated towns. At least the solutions to these problems tend to be different for us, rural folks. - BEN-WDM-1, historically, has seen substantial changes every ten years with reapportionment and we do not believe that, in this cycle, it should change again. Our district is working and our population is relatively stable, and so we believe reapportionment would be an unnecessary hardship. - Our current configuration is covered by the same local newspaper, a more important factor than folks from more populated areas might appreciate. - Our district is currently covered by two school supervisory districts. Your proposal would mean that there would be three different supervisory districts. - The district you have proposed for us deviates below the recommended number of people per district more than almost any other proposed district. Dover's population gain was perhaps more due to the covid bump than any other town. It would make sense, since our district's population is not a problem that you make our district closer to the target population thinking of continuity for us in the future.**
 - BEN-1 Remove Stamford. Add Woodford. Add a portion of both BEN-2-2 and BEN-2-3 along Bennington's Southern border totaling 250 people. - This district is losing population. **Our district should not be reworked to fix this problem when a solution more in line with your statutory goals exists.** Our proposed change would result in the same number of people represented in BEN-1 as you are currently proposing for our district. - Given the mountain ridge between Stamford and Pownal and the Route 8/Route 100 link between Stamford and the rest of our district, Stamford should remain with Readsboro in BEN-WDM-1.
 - BEN-2-2 Remove a strip along the Southern border of 125 people to add to BEN-1. - This district would still have over 4,000 people. Population centers are used to intra-town districts. This line could easily follow roads excluding the more urban part of Bennington.
 - BEN-2-1 Add Glastenbury - The population in Glastenbury is completely cut off from the rest of your proposed BEN-WDM-1 district. If you look at a nighttime satellite photo of Southern Vermont, that big, inky black void in the middle lies between these folks and the rest of the district. Interestingly, your inclusion of Glastenbury in our district makes perfect sense if you want to increase the statutory "compactness" of our district. The reality on the ground in a mountain state gives the lie to this as a goal.

House Government Operations Maps

[Readsboro Testimony](#) Feb 4 and Feb 14⁵

[Dover Testimony](#) Feb 15

The ideal district size after the 2020 census is every 4287 citizens have 1 representative.



Current Yellow District

This district has 5169 people in it and 1 representative. They have seen population gain. They are at the top of the West River and are connected by Stratton and Bromley

$5169/4287 = 1.2$ representatives.

These citizens have too few representatives

Current Pink and Green Districts

Have 8732 people and have two representatives. They have maintained or grown population. **They are on the eastern side of the Green Mountains in the Deerfield River Valley along Route 100.**

$8732/4287 = 2.0$ representatives

These citizens have just the right number of representatives

CURRENT BLUE DISTRICTS: These 6 districts have 30,937 people and 8 representatives. They have all seen population loss. **They are in between the eastern Taconics and the western slope of the Green Mountains along Route 7**

$30,937/4287 = 7.2$ representatives

These citizens have too many representatives

⁵ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/document/2022/14/Subject/382646#documents-section>