

From: Merrill Bent
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2022 9:16 AM
To: 'scopelandhanzas@leg.state.vt.us' <scopelandhanzas@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: Reapportionment Ben-4 District - Sunderland Resident

Dear Chair Copelandhanzas and members of the House Committee on Government Operations:

I am a resident of Sunderland, Vermont, where I live with my husband and two children (5 year old and 10 month old). I am a lifelong Vermonter, and I have lived in northern Bennington County for the past 9 years. My husband and I are both working professionals in our thirties.

I would like to express my concern about the new proposed reapportionment, which would make Manchester a 1-member district, separate from Arlington, Sandgate, and Sunderland as another 1-member district. For residents of Sunderland, the existing configuration is much more aligned with the reapportionment standards in 17 V.S.A. § 1903.

Of the three factors in § 1903(b), both (b)(1) and (b)(3) are straightforward when it comes to the reapportionment analysis, weighing in favor of retaining the current structure. However, (b)(2) is the most critical for residents of Sunderland:

Recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties, and common interests.

This factor weighs heavily in favor of retaining the existing regional approach, rather than segregating Manchester as its own district. Residents of Sunderland are already very well represented under the current configuration, by representatives who understand how these towns interact where towns are so small they must share resources (and therefore have significant common interests) with a larger neighboring town. Sunderland has no stores, a small K-6 elementary school, and not even our own library, post office, or zip code. We depend largely on our neighbor, Manchester, for our social and economic infrastructure. Our current two-member district reflects that reality.

Sunderland school children go to Sunderland Elementary School until sixth grade, after which they attend Manchester Elementary and Middle School. For high school, Sunderland students have school choice—most go to Burr & Burton, also in Manchester. My children both went to day care in Manchester, my son goes to summer camp in Manchester (my daughter eventually will), we use the Manchester recreation facilities, and by and large my kids socialize with and have common interests with children who reside in Sunderland and Manchester. A lot of people choose to reside in Sunderland *because* of the connection to Manchester (in fact, I refer to Sunderland as a “suburb” of Manchester).

Setting Manchester off as its own 1-member district would jeopardize this harmonious balance, and it would be contrary to the existing social and political

networks among these towns, as well as to the outcome of our local school consolidation efforts.

Sunderland's representation must be aligned with the Town of Manchester in order to preserve and support our existing social and economic structure.

Thank you for considering my view as to why Bennington-4 should continue to be a two-member district based on a regional approach.

Sincerely,

Merrill Bent, Sunderland, VT