

**Senate Education Committee**  
**H. 727 – Section 5**  
**Stowe Withdrawal from LSUU**  
**April, 8, 2022**

Thank you very much Mr. Chair, for inviting us in to speak with the committee today on H. 727.

I want to give my Stowe partners most of the time to speak and share their thoughts, but before I turn it over to them, I'd like to provide some background so that you all might understand better why we find ourselves in front of you today.

On May 11, 2021, Stowe voted overwhelmingly (1068-464) to withdraw from the Lamoille South Unified Union School District.

On May 28, 2021, the Secretary of State's office sent a letter to the other two LSUU member towns, Morristown and Elmore, certifying the Stowe vote to withdraw.

And on December 7, 2021, both Elmore and Morristown ratified the withdrawal of Stowe from the Lamoille South Unified Union School District.

It has been over 16 weeks since all of what is required by us under current law has been done, and we have yet to even get a hearing in front of the State Board of Education, much less an approval from them.

The issue of whether Stowe, Morristown, and Elmore should merge has been studied for 18 years. There were two major studies conducted by committees with representation from all three towns. Both of these studies determined that there was no justification to merge – student outcomes and equity would not improve, and there would be no cost benefit.

The time spent analyzing and weighing the educational and financial implications of this issue and the amount written about this issue has been exhaustive. Close to 200 pages of information on this issue are publicly available.

When Act 46 passed and progressed, the 2017 Alternative Governance Structure proposal, developed jointly by the Stowe and Elmore-Morristown School Boards, determined that we had two high functioning school districts; and recommended that EMUU and Stowe remain as two separate, side-by-side school districts.

The 2017 Alternative Governance Structure proposal was supported by the entire Lamoille County legislative delegation at the time and every School Board Director of the Stowe and EMUU School Boards.

Most importantly, it was also supported by the State Agency of Education when they recommended that the Alternative Governance Structure be approved by the State Board of Education as part of the State Plan.

Ultimately, though, in a split decision, the State Board of Education voted, by one vote, to merge the Stowe and Elmore-Morristown School Districts.

So, on July 1, 2019, the Stowe School District and the Elmore-Morristown School District merged into the Lamoille South Unified Union School District.

Then, last year, in accordance with State Law and our LSUU Articles of Agreement that had been approved by all three communities, and by both the State Agency of Education and the Board of Education, the voters of Stowe voted to withdraw from LSUU, and the LSUU member towns then ratified the withdrawal.

The withdrawal of Stowe from the LSUU is now in front of the State Board for approval, but they have not taken it up because the Agency of Education has claimed (wrongly) that the Board does not have the authority to do so.

We disagree completely – for many reasons that we have presented over and over again. But, the Board argues that they need authority provided in state law to move forward. So, that is why we are here now. The only other avenue we have is the legal avenue.

With regard to H. 727 itself, we appreciate the work of the House Education Committee to include a provision in the bill to allow for Stowe's withdrawal to be approved. Section 5 does that.

As I have made clear, our communities have been put through the Act 46 wringer for the last five years.

It is time for us to be allowed to move forward with our schools in the way that will best meet the needs of our students. And what best meets the needs of our students is to return to the having two separate, side-by-side districts under one Supervisory Union – the model that was working so well prior to our merger, and the model recommended by the Agency those years ago.