TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

The Committee on Education to which was referred Senate Bill No. 219 entitled “An act relating to ensuring compliance with the U.S. and Vermont Constitutions in the use of public funds for tuition and in the dual enrollment program” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

*** Provision of Publicly Funded Education in Vermont ***

Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. § 820 is added to read:

§ 820. PROVISION OF PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION IN VERMONT

(a) Findings and purpose.

(1) The Vermont Constitution provides that “a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town unless the general assembly permits other provisions for the convenient instruction of youth.” VT Const. CH II, § 68. Interpreting this provision in Brigham v. State, 692 A.2d 384 (1997), the Vermont Supreme Court stated that “[t]he state may delegate to local towns and cities the authority to finance and administer the schools within their borders; it cannot, however, abdicate the basic responsibility for education by passing it on to local governments, which are themselves creations of the state.” Id. at 395.
(A) From this, it is evident that the State has a constitutional obligation to provide public education to its youth. Many Vermont school districts operate schools, but others do not. Vermont is a relatively sparsely populated and mountainous state that has made the operation of public schools unviable in certain regions of the State. Students who live in these regions do not have the choice of enrolling in a public school in their district; their only choice is to enroll in a public school operated by another school district or an independent school or to be homeschooled.

(B) Therefore, in order to fulfill its constitutional requirement to provide public education to its youth, the State permits school districts that do not operate schools (nonoperating school districts) to use public funds to send their resident youth to public schools operated by other school districts or to certain independent schools. In order for an independent school to be eligible to receive public tuition, this section requires these schools to:

(i) comply with all federal and State antidiscrimination laws applicable to Vermont public schools; and

(ii) not use public tuition to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views.

(2) Chapter 1, Article 3 of the Vermont Constitution, known as the “Compelled Support Clause,” provides that “no person ... can be compelled to support any place of worship ... contrary to the dictates of conscience ...”
(A) In *Chittenden Town v. Department of Education*, 38 A.2d 539 (Vt. 1999), the Vermont Supreme Court held that a school district may pay public tuition to a school with a religious mission under the Compelled Support Clause if the school has adequate safeguards against the use of such funds for religious worship or instruction or the propagation of religious views.

(B) This section sets out adequate safeguards to ensure that public tuition is not used for religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views.

(b) Conditions for eligibility of an approved independent school to receive public tuition. An approved independent school shall be eligible to receive public tuition only if all of the following conditions are met.

(1)(A) The school has adopted and implemented policies and procedures to comply with all federal and State antidiscrimination laws applicable to Vermont public schools and makes reasonable efforts to enforce these policies and procedures. Compliance with the requirements set forth in these antidiscrimination laws includes compliance with the Vermont Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A. chapter 139, the Vermont Fair Employment Practices laws, 21 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 6, and all other federal and State antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools, to the same extent that these laws apply to public schools, even if those laws by their terms do not apply to the approved independent school.
(B) The school posts and maintains on its website in a prominent place its policy to comply with all antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools.

(2) None of the public tuition will be used to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views, except for religious instruction that is designed to provide an overview of religious history and teachings and does not support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of any one religion or theology over others. In this section, “indoctrination” means the process of repeating an idea or belief to someone until they accept it without criticism or question.

(3) The school receives approval from the State Board of Education to receive public tuition. In order to receive State Board approval, the school shall, in addition to satisfying any conditions required by the State Board, enter into a contract with the State Board, signed by an authorized representative acting on behalf of the school’s governing body, agreeing to comply with the eligibility requirements under subdivisions (1)–(2) of this subsection (antidiscrimination; no use of funds for religious purposes).

(c) Process for payment and school selection.

(1) The State Board of Education shall maintain a list of approved independent schools eligible to receive public tuition on its website.
(2) A school district may only pay tuition to an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition listed on the State Board’s website. Payment of public tuition shall be made directly from the district to the school unless otherwise required by court order.

(d) Approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition. As used in this title, an “approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition” means an approved independent school that is eligible to receive public tuition under this section. An independent school meeting education quality standards under section 165 of this title or an approved independent school in Vermont functioning as an approved area career technical center under chapter 37 of this title that seeks to receive public tuition is required also to qualify as an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition.

Sec. 1a. 16 V.S.A. § 820 is amended to read:

§ 820. PROVISION OF PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION IN VERMONT

(a) Findings and purpose.

(1) The Vermont Constitution provides that “a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town unless the general assembly permits other provisions for the convenient instruction of youth.” VT Const. CH II, § 68. Interpreting this provision in Brigham v. State, 692 A.2d 384 (1997), the Vermont Supreme Court stated that “[t]he state may delegate to
local towns and cities the authority to finance and administer the schools
within their borders; it cannot, however, abdicate the basic responsibility for
education by passing it on to local governments, which are themselves
creations of the state.” Id. at 395.

* * *

(B) Therefore, in order to fulfill its constitutional requirement to
provide public education to its youth, the State permits school districts that do
not operate schools (nonoperating school districts) to use public funds to send
their resident youth to public schools operated by other school districts or to
certain independent schools. In order for an independent school to be eligible
to receive public tuition, this section requires these schools to:

(i) comply with all federal and State antidiscrimination laws

applicable to Vermont public schools; and

(ii) not use public tuition to support religious instruction, religious
indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views; and

(iii) enroll any student with an individualized education program

(IEP) who requires special education services and who is placed in the
independent school as an appropriate placement and least restrictive
environment for the student by the student’s individualized education program
team or by the local education agency (LEA) as required under section 2973 of
this title.
(b) Conditions for eligibility of an approved independent school to receive public tuition. An approved independent school shall be eligible to receive public tuition only if all of the following conditions are met.

* * *

(3) The school enrolls any student with an individualized education program who requires special education services and who is placed in the approved independent school as an appropriate placement and least restrictive environment for the student by the student’s individualized education program team or by LEA as required under section 2973 of this title.

(3)(4) The school receives approval from the State Board of Education to receive public tuition. In order to receive State Board approval, the school shall, in addition to satisfying any conditions required by the State Board, enter into a contract with the State Board, signed by an authorized representative acting on behalf of the school’s governing body, agreeing to comply with the eligibility requirements under subdivisions (1)–(2)(3) of this subsection (antidiscrimination; no use of funds for religious purposes; enrollment of students on an IEP).
* * * Unlawful Employment Practice * * *

Sec. 2. 21 V.S.A. § 495 is amended to read:

§ 495. UNLAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE

**

(e) The provisions of this section prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity shall not be construed to prohibit or prevent any religious or denominational institution or organization, or any organization operated for charitable or educational purposes, that is operated, supervised, or controlled by or in connection with a religious organization, from giving preference to persons of the same religion or denomination or from taking any action with respect to matters of employment that is calculated by the organization to promote the religious principles for which it is established or maintained. [Repealed.]

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* * *

* * * Dual Enrollment * * *

Sec. 3. 16 V.S.A. § 944 is amended to read:

§ 944. DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

**

(b) Students.

(1) A Vermont resident who has completed grade 10 but has not received a high school diploma is eligible to participate in the Program if:
(A) the student:

(i) is enrolled in:

(I) a Vermont public school, including a Vermont career technical center;

(II) a public school in another state or an approved independent school that is designated as the public secondary school for the student’s district of residence; or

(III) an approved independent school in Vermont to which the student’s district of residence pays publicly funded tuition on behalf of the student;

(ii) is assigned to a public school through the High School Completion Program; or

(iii) is a home study student;

none of the payment to the accredited postsecondary institution will be used to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination (as defined in section 820 of this title), religious worship, or the propagation of religious views, except for religious instruction that is designed to provide an overview of religious history and teachings and does not support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views of any one religion or theology over others; and
(B) the student is not enrolled in a recognized independent
school or a school or program that is not recognized for attendance purposes
under section 1121 of this title;

(B)(C) dual enrollment is an element included within the student’s
personalized learning plan; and

(C)(D) the secondary school and the postsecondary institution have
determined that the student is sufficiently prepared to succeed in a dual
enrollment course, which can be determined in part by the assessment tool or
tools identified by the participating postsecondary institution.

* * *

* * * Conforming Changes * * *

Sec. 4. 16 V.S.A. § 11 is amended to read:

§ 11. CLASSIFICATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

(a) As used in this title, unless the context otherwise clearly requires:

* * *

(20a) “Approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition”
means an approved independent school that is also approved by the State
Board of Education to receive public tuition under section 820 of this title.

* * *
Sec. 5. 16 V.S.A. § 165 is amended to read:

§ 165. EDUCATION QUALITY STANDARDS; EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES; INDEPENDENT SCHOOL MEETING EDUCATION QUALITY STANDARDS

* * *

(b) Annually, the Secretary shall determine whether students in each Vermont public school are provided educational opportunities substantially equal to those provided in other public schools. If the Secretary determines that a school is not meeting the education quality standards listed in subsection (a) of this section or that the school is making insufficient progress in improving student performance in relation to the standards for student performance set forth in subdivision 164(9) of this title, he or she shall describe in writing actions that a district must take in order to meet either or both sets of standards and shall provide technical assistance to the school. If the school fails to meet the standards or make sufficient progress within two years of the determination, the Secretary shall recommend to the State Board one or more of the following actions:

* * *

(4) the State Board close an individual school or schools and require that the school district pay tuition to another public school or an approved
independent school pursuant to chapter 21 of this title eligible to receive public

tuition; or

***

Sec. 6. 16 V.S.A. § 166 is amended to read:

§ 166. APPROVED AND RECOGNIZED INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

***

(b) Approved independent schools. On application, the State Board shall approve an independent school that offers elementary or secondary education if it finds, after opportunity for hearing, that the school provides a minimum course of study pursuant to section 906 of this title and that it substantially complies with all statutory requirements for approved independent schools and the Board’s rules for approved independent schools. An independent school that intends to accept public tuition shall be approved by the State Board only on the condition that the school agrees, notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, to enroll any student who requires special education services and who is placed in or referred to the approved independent school as an appropriate placement and least restrictive environment for the student by the student’s individualized education program team or by the local education agency; provided, however, that this requirement shall not apply to an independent school that limits enrollment to students who are on an individualized education program or a plan under Section 504 of the
Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, and who are enrolled pursuant to
a written agreement between the local education agency and the school.

Except as provided in subdivision (6) of this subsection, the Board’s rules must
at minimum require that the school have the resources required to meet its
stated objectives, including financial capacity, faculty who are qualified by
training and experience in the areas in which they are assigned, and physical
facilities and special services that are in accordance with any State or federal
law or regulation. Approval may be granted without State Board evaluation in
the case of any school accredited by a private, State, or regional agency
recognized by the State Board for accrediting purposes, provided that the State
Board shall determine that the school complies with all student enrollment
provisions required by law.

* * *

Sec. 7.  16 V.S.A. § 821 is amended to read:

§ 821. SCHOOL DISTRICT TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS OR PAY TUITION

* * *

(d) Notwithstanding subdivision (a)(1) of this section, the electorate of a
school district that does not maintain an elementary school may grant general
authority to the school board to pay tuition for an elementary student at an
approved independent elementary school eligible to receive public tuition or an
independent school meeting education quality standards pursuant to sections 823 and 828 of this chapter upon notice given by the student’s parent or legal guardian before April 15 for the next academic year.

Sec. 8. 16 V.S.A. § 822 is amended to read:

§ 822. SCHOOL DISTRICT TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS OR PAY TUITION

(a) Each school district shall maintain one or more approved high schools in which high school education is provided for its resident students unless:

(1) the electorate authorizes the school board to close an existing high school and to provide for the high school education of its students by paying tuition to a public high school, an approved independent high school, or an independent school meeting education quality standards, to be selected by the parents or guardians of the student, within or outside the State in accordance with sections 824 and 828 of this title; or

* * *

(c)(1) A school district may both maintain a high school and furnish high school education by paying tuition:

* * *

(B) to an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition or an independent school meeting education quality standards if the
school board judges that a student has unique educational needs that cannot be served within the district or at a nearby public school.

* * *

Sec. 9. 16 V.S.A. § 823 is amended to read:

§ 823. ELEMENTARY TUITION

(1) Unless the electorate of a school district authorizes payment of a higher amount at an annual or special meeting warned for the purpose, the tuition paid to an approved independent elementary school eligible to receive public tuition or an independent school meeting education quality standards shall not exceed the least of:

* * *

Sec. 10. 16 V.S.A. § 824 is amended to read:

§ 824. HIGH SCHOOL TUITION

(1) The district shall pay an amount not to exceed the average announced tuition of Vermont union high schools for the year of attendance for its students enrolled in an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition that does not function as a Vermont area career technical center, or any higher amount approved by the electorate at an annual or special meeting warned for that purpose.
Sec. 11. 16 V.S.A. § 827 is amended to read:

§ 827. DESIGNATION OF A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL OR AN APPROVED INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL AS THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT

(a) A school district not maintaining an approved public high school may vote on such terms or conditions as it deems appropriate, to designate three or fewer approved independent schools eligible to receive public tuition or public high schools as the public high school or schools of the district.

* * *

(c) A parent or legal guardian who is dissatisfied with the instruction provided at a designated school or who cannot obtain for his or her the parent’s or legal guardian’s child the kind of course or instruction desired there, or whose child can be better accommodated in an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition or public high school nearer his or her the child’s home during the next academic year, may request on or before April 15 that the school board pay tuition to another approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition or public high school selected by the parent or guardian.

* * *

(e) Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary:
(2) unless otherwise directed by an affirmative vote of the school
district, when the Wells Board approves parental requests to pay tuition to a
nondesignated approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition
or public school, the Board shall pay tuition in an amount not to exceed the
base education amount as determined under section 4011 of this title for the
fiscal year in which tuition is being paid; and

(3) unless otherwise directed by an affirmative vote of the school
district, when the Strafford Board approves a parental request to pay tuition to
a nondesignated approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition
or public school, the Board shall pay tuition to the nondesignated school
pursuant to section 824 of this title for the year in which the student is enrolled;
provided, however, that it shall not pay tuition in an amount that exceeds the
tuition paid to the designated school for the same academic year.

Sec. 12. 16 V.S.A. § 828 is amended to read:

§ 828. TUITION TO APPROVED SCHOOLS; AGE; APPEAL

(a) A school district shall not pay the tuition of a student except to a public
school, an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition, an
independent school meeting education quality standards, a tutorial program
approved by the State Board, an approved education program, or, subject to
subsection (b) of this section, an independent school in another state or country
approved under the laws of that state or country, nor shall payment be made

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of tuition on behalf of a person shall not be denied on account of age. Unless
otherwise provided, a person who is aggrieved by a decision of a school board
relating to eligibility for tuition payments, the amount of tuition payable, or the
school he or she may attend, may appeal to the State Board, and its
decision shall be final.

(b) An independent school in another state or country that is approved
under the laws of that state or country is eligible to receive public tuition if all
of the following conditions are met:

   (1) It is located in a state that borders Vermont or in the Quebec
Province of Canada, provided that an independent school that is not located in
a state that borders Vermont or in the Quebec Province of Canada shall be
eligible to receive public tuition if:

      (A) the student is on an individual education program (IEP) and is
placed at the school in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act, 20 U.S.C. chapter 33, as amended;

      (B) the student is on a plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation
Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, as amended (504 Plan); or

      (C) the student is determined to be disabled by the evaluation
planning team or local education agency representative under State Board of
Education rules.
(2)(A) The independent school has adopted and implemented policies and procedures to comply with all antidiscrimination laws applicable to public schools in the state or country where the independent school is located and makes reasonable efforts to enforce these policies and procedures. Compliance with the requirements set forth in these antidiscrimination laws includes compliance with antidiscrimination laws to the same extent as these laws apply to public schools, even if those laws by their terms do not apply to the independent school.

(B) The independent school posts and maintains on its website in a prominent place its policy to comply with all antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools in the state or country where the independent school is located.

(3) None of the public tuition will be used to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination (as defined in section 820 of this title), religious worship, or the propagation of religious views, except for religious instruction that is designed to provide an overview of religious history and teachings and does not support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views of any one religion or theology over others.

(4) The independent school enters into a contract with the Vermont State Board of Education, signed by an authorized representative acting on
behalf of the school’s governing body, agreeing to comply with the eligibility
requirements under subdivisions (2)–(3) of this subsection (antidiscrimination;
no use of funds for religious purposes).
Sec. 13. 16 V.S.A. § 1073 is amended to read:
§ 1073. “LEGAL PUPIL” DEFINED; ACCESS TO SCHOOL

(b) Access to school.

(2) Right to enroll in a public or independent school. Notwithstanding
the provisions of sections 822 and 1075 of this title, a pregnant or parenting
student may enroll in any approved public school in Vermont or an adjacent
state, any approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition in
Vermont, or any other educational program approved by the State Board in
which any other legal pupil in Vermont may enroll.

Sec. 14. 16 V.S.A. § 2962 is amended to read:
§ 2962. EXTRAORDINARY SPECIAL EDUCATION REIMBURSEMENT

(e) Under section 2973 of this title, a supervisory union, in its role as the
local education agency, may place a student with an individualized education
program under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C.
chapter 33, with certain approved independent schools that accept public tuition eligible to receive public tuition. If the approved independent school is entitled to special education cost reimbursement under that section, it may bill the supervisory union for excess special education costs incurred by the independent school in providing special education services to that student beyond those covered by general tuition. If those costs for that student exceed the extraordinary expenditures threshold as defined in subdivision (a)(2) of this section, the supervisory union shall be entitled to extraordinary reimbursement.

Sec. 15. 16 V.S.A. § 2973 is amended to read:

§ 2973. INDEPENDENT SCHOOL TUITION RATES

(a)(1) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, an approved independent school that accepts eligible to receive public tuition shall enroll any student with an individualized education program who requires special education services and who is placed in the approved independent school as an appropriate placement and least restrictive environment for the student by the student’s individualized education program team or by the local education agency (LEA); provided, however, that this requirement shall not apply to an independent school that limits enrollment to students who are on an individualized education program or a plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, and who are enrolled pursuant to a written agreement between the LEA and the school.
Sec. 16. DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARD CONTRACT

(a) On or before August 1, 2022, the State Board of Education shall create and post on its website a standard form contract for use by approved independent schools eligible to receive public tuition that complies with the requirements of 16 V.S.A. § 820(b)(3) (antidiscrimination; no use of funds for religious purposes; enrollment of students on an individualized education program). The contract shall contain each of the following provisions:

(1) The State Board’s authorization for the school to receive public tuition is conditioned on continued compliance by the school of this contract as well as any other conditions required by law or State Board rules.

(2)(A) The school has adopted and implemented policies and procedures to comply with all federal and State antidiscrimination laws applicable to Vermont public schools and makes reasonable efforts to enforce these policies and procedures. Compliance with the requirements set forth in these antidiscrimination laws includes compliance with the Vermont Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A. chapter 139, the Vermont Fair Employment Practices laws, 21 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 6, and all other federal and State antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools to the same extent.
that these laws apply to public schools, even if those laws by their terms do not apply to the school.

(B) The school has posted and shall maintain on its website in a prominent place its policy to comply with all antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools.

(3) None of the public tuition will be used by the school to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views, except for religious instruction that is designed to provide an overview of religious history and teachings and does not support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of any one religion or theology over others. As used in this contract, “indoctrination” means the process of repeating an idea or belief to someone until they accept it without criticism or question.

(4) Commencing with the 2023–2024 school year and thereafter, the school shall enroll any student with an individualized education program who requires special education services and who is placed in the school as an appropriate placement and least restrictive environment for the student by the student’s individualized education program team or by the local education agency as required under 16 V.S.A. § 2973.

(b) On or before August 1, 2022, the State Board of Education shall create and post on its website a standard form contract for use by independent schools
in another state or country that complies with the requirements of 16 V.S.A. § 828(b) (antidiscrimination; no use of funds for religious purposes). The contract shall contain each of the following provisions:

(1) The State Board’s authorization for the school to receive public tuition is conditioned on continued compliance by the school of this contract.

(2)(A) The independent school has adopted and implemented policies and procedures to comply with all antidiscrimination laws applicable to public schools in the state or country where the independent school is located and makes reasonable efforts to enforce these policies and procedures. Compliance with the requirements set forth in these antidiscrimination laws includes compliance with antidiscrimination laws to the same extent as these laws apply to public schools, even if those laws by their terms do not apply to the independent school.

(B) The independent school posts and maintains on its website in a prominent place its policy to comply with all antidiscrimination laws that apply to public schools in the state or country where the independent school is located.

(3) None of the public tuition will be used to support religious instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of religious views, except for religious instruction that is designed to provide an overview of religious history and teachings and does not support religious
instruction, religious indoctrination, religious worship, or the propagation of
religious views of any one religion or theology over others. As used in this
contract, “indoctrination” means the process of repeating an idea or belief to
someone until they accept it without criticism or question.

(c) A contract signed on behalf of the State Board and a school under 16
V.S.A. § 820(b)(3) or 828(b) shall contain no other conditions or requirements
than those required under this section. The State Board and the school shall
amend the contract as necessary to comply with applicable law, and the State
Board shall amend its model contracts accordingly.

*** Transition ***

Sec. 17. TRANSITION

A student enrolled for the 2021–2022 school year in, or has been accepted
for enrollment for the 2022–2023 school year by, an independent school in
another state or country that would not be eligible to receive public tuition
under 16 V.S.A. § 828 as amended by this act shall continue to be entitled to
public tuition until such time as the student graduates from that school. The
school shall not be required to enter into the contract with the Vermont State
Board of Education under 16 V.S.A. § 828 as amended by this act.
*** Effective Dates ***

Sec. 18. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on passage, except that Secs. 1a, 6, 14, and 15 shall take effect on July 1, 2023.

and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act relating to ensuring compliance with the U.S. and Vermont Constitutions in the use of public funds for tuition”

(Committee vote: ____________)

_____________________

Senator ________________

FOR THE COMMITTEE