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***METTAWEE SCHOOL DISTRICT •• TACONIC AND GREEN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT ••
WINHALL SCHOOL DISTRICT***

March 14, 2022

Vermont State Senators Campion, Clarkson, Collamore, Hooker, McCormack, Nitka, Sears and Terenzini
Vermont State Representatives Achey, Bongartz, Durfee, James, Pajala and Sullivan
Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director, Vermont School Boards Association

Re: S.219

Dear Senators, Representatives and Ms. Ceglowski,

The Board of the Taconic and Green Regional School District supports Bill S.219 as presently proposed because it maintains the best parts of school choice. There are many that will weigh-in against school choice, and therefore, Bill S.219. But that is because implementation of school choice is complicated and time consuming. Many don't see any benefit in maintaining this "unwieldy" system. However, we see the benefits of school choice every day. First is the tradition of academic fundamentals, education innovation, civil discourse that school choice and the original "academies" fostered. Second is setting a high standard of education that the community liked, utilized, and therefore funded. Third is the proof as shown in our healthy, thriving community. School choice is part of why people choose to live in many of our Vermont communities because we reputedly have "good school.". Fourth the system is working because every year our communities vote overwhelmingly to support our school choice program that includes access to independent schools.

Bill S.219 provides a "best practice" mechanism for implementing school choice within our state and nation that works with the principle of the "Separation of Church and State", instead of against it. S.219 allows appropriate bridging between the elements of Church and State so they are working together instead of in competition.

In particular S.219 addresses the issue of public funds being used to pay for religious education. S.219 seeks to identify the portion of the education provided by the religious school that is religious study and the portion that is secular. Of course public funds cannot be used to reimburse for religious education. But they can be used to reimburse the cost of the secular portion of the education provided by a religious school. It is our understanding that this practice is already in place in several parts of the State of Vermont. We know that many school districts across the state are engaged in this practice. We know this is also the practice of the Taconic and Green.

DETAILS SUPPORTING SCHOOL CHOICE AND BILL #S.219

1. **Historical Precedent:** In Vermont, the "Academies" all pre-dated public education. They were the model upon which much of Vermont's public education system was built. From their inception they set the tone with academic study, and by educating the whole person and not simply the brain. Those "Academies" that were effective and pro-active also adapted. They survived and thrived;
2. **Healthy Competition:** Independent schools can provide an excellent option where public schools are not available. When the public schools are available, independent schools provide an alternative that serves to stimulate public schools, challenging them to improve and update their programs in order to remain a competitive and attractive option to the parents in the surrounding community;

3. A Healthy Thriving Community: When families begin to consider moving to Vermont there are a number of element that go into that decision. People want a safe and secure place to raise their children. They also want access to “good schools.” Inevitably the question comes up: “How good are the local public schools?” In the Taconic and Green District, Burr & Burton Academy, the Long Trail School, and others are available to all residents. Collectively our area is reputed as offering excellent education opportunities. This is a great magnet to attract newcomers to our community.
4. Access to and payment for independent schools is reaffirmed annually when the voters approve the education budget. In our district the school budget always passes. This clearly indicates that voters are pleased with the overall impact of independent schools on education in our district.

We believe it is very important to take this “best practice” and turn it into law. This is a crucial first step to preserving school choice. It is a critical first step to protecting and preserving the best parts of what independent schools provide the State of Vermont. We agree with the limited scope of the bill, as presently proposed. Consistent with our policies and procedures, however, we reserve the right to question any revision of the bill which might conflict with our policies, practices, and operational procedures.

Respectfully submitted,



Herbert Ogden
Chair, Taconic and Green Regional School District

cc: Headmaster, Burr and Burton Academy
Head of School, Long Trail School
Headmaster, St. Johnsbury Academy
Head of School, Lyndon Institute
Head of School, Thetford Academy
Chair, State Board of Education