

April 24, 2023

Dear Chair Campion and the Senate Education Committee:

Vermont Care Partners is proud of the 14 therapeutic schools embedded within Vermont's designated community mental health agencies. Ranging in size from serving 5-90 students, our schools provide therapeutic instruction to students whose social, emotional, or behavioral needs exceed what can be supported in public school settings. Decisions for placement into our schools are made by the referring school district through an IEP process, often informed by input from mental health providers and/or DCF teams, as well as families and educators. Enrollment decisions are made throughout the year and may not line up with the school calendar. Our schools fill a key need in our broader system that allows students with significant challenges to stay in their home communities and avoid a more restrictive and more costly residential level of care. More information about our network of schools can be found [here](#).




Given that we are an essential component in the Vermont educational landscape, we support the language in H.483 that carves out "therapeutic approved independent schools" as its own unique category (Section 12). We also have no concerns with the rate setting language specific to therapeutic schools in Section 14.

We would like to comment on Section 18, and request modification to exclude therapeutic schools from the moratorium on approval of new independent schools. Given the significant behavioral and mental health needs of Vermont students, waitlist for placements at our schools, and dwindling in-state and out-of-state options for residential care, it's possible that our local schools, our agencies, and our state partners will want to develop new therapeutic school programming. We believe the intent of this section is not to limit that potential resource, but rather a different type of independent school. Therefore, we would suggest the following:

**Sec. 18. MORATORIUM ON NEW APPROVED INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE PUBLIC TUITION**

Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the State Board of Education shall be prohibited from providing initial approval for an approved independent school, except for a therapeutic school, to be eligible to receive public tuition to any school, that submits an initial attestation pursuant 16 V.S.A. § 166(b)(9)(x) after August 1, 2023. The moratorium created under this section shall remain in effect until further direction by the General Assembly.



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We would be happy to provide further written or verbal testimony on this topic if the committee is interested.

Sincerely,

Lisa Bilowith, Chair  
VCP Therapeutic School Directors' Group

Dillon Burns, Mental Health Services Director  
Vermont Care Partners