

May 2, 2023

Vermont Senate Committee on Education

Dear Honorable Senators,


I am writing to ask you, directly, to **please vote on H.483 now**. I believe very strongly that the future of Vermont and, on many levels, our democracy, is tied to this bill. H.483 is a step forward towards keeping the values of equity, transparency and accountability at the heart of our education delivery system. This bill will support both public schools and approved independent schools.

This is not just another letter from a school board member or someone involved in public education. I am setting aside those hats in order to write to you today as an **immigrant**; as a person who became a citizen of the United States in order to serve on a local school board. I grew up in Guatemala City, where children and families lacked the basic human right of a properly funded public education. I know - firsthand - what it means to divest out funding from public education. I know what it means to have parallel educational systems. When I became familiar with the miracle of public education in Vermont, I very quickly came to understand that public education is the basis of your democracy; a democracy that is now mine as well.

Unless you've seen and experienced it personally, it is hard to fully explain - and understand - what it means to live in a country that doesn't have accountability and transparency in the use of public dollars. The pandemic that afflicted us recently was a good reminder of what, and how, we need to prioritize; and I believe it reminded us that we need to prioritize community and common good. Public education might not be perfect, but it is the foundational reason we enjoy a democracy here in the United States. How often I have wished I could bring the basic tenets of a free and public education back to the country I grew up in. Vermont has always been among the first states in the country to stand up for what is right; and in doing so set an example to the nation. The question before us now is: do we have the courage to do so again; to uphold our values and beliefs.

A strong public education is the basis of democracy and the key to successful communities. H.483 will help us move in the right direction. We have a moral obligation to leverage and support public education, not only to make a difference in Vermont; but to set an example for the country and the world. What you decide to do will have an impact on our children and families for years to come. I offer you my thoughts and experience as both an immigrant and a board member; and I hope you will have the strength to bring this bill forward and allow the senate to vote on it. Please do it now and vote your deepest conscience, understanding that the stakes are high, and that your vote will shape the future of education for generations to come.

Respectfully,


Flor Diaz Smith

East Montpelier, VT