



To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Jay Nichols, Executive Director

Date: April 23, 2024

Subject: Nomination for Secretary of Education

This written communication is based on in person conversations, emails, drop-in meetings, and group discussions with members of the Vermont Principals' Association as to the Governor's nomination of Zoie Saunders for the critical position of Secretary of Education. Our membership has overwhelmingly expressed concerns with this selection. I know many of our members have reached out to individual senators to express their concerns.

Our members are committed to public education and to Vermont children. We see this as an incredibly important appointment. Our public education delivery system is under extreme duress. We need a leader that the field can both trust and be inspired by. To select a candidate who has never been a teacher, principal, or superintendent is very disconcerting.

The two biggest issues that our members have brought to our attention as major concerns are her lack of qualifications for the position and the fact that Ms. Saunders has virtually no public education leadership experience. In fact, her relevant leadership experience appears to be almost exclusively in the for profit charter school world. For profit charter schools are known for their lack of equity and their siphoning of public tax dollars from needy school communities.

We hope that the Senate Education Committee understands the immense amount of deep concerns the field has right now in the leadership of the agency. Asking school board members, superintendents, principals and teachers to trust someone who has not held any of those positions and has worked for a company that places profit over student learning is a bridge too far. Please join the vast majority of our members in opposing this nomination.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jay Nichols