

TESTIMONY ON H 875

My name is Bradley J. Bender and I would like to thank the Senate Committee on Government Operations for giving me this opportunity to testify in opposition to H 875.

I am in my second term on the Danby Select Board and have been Chair for four years. I am also a Town Justice, Trustee of Public Funds and Clerk/Treasurer of the Danby-Mt. Tabor Fire District #1. I have more than thirty years of service to our town having held various offices over the years.

Although H875 may have good intent, it will have more bad consequences. Vermonters have a tradition of pride in their strong, diverse local boards comprised of local citizens from all walks of life who have guided their towns through various events for hundreds of years. The voters elect local town officers based on their reputations as being honest, hard-working members of the community. They have a deeper knowledge of the people they elect to local offices than they do to state or federal offices. Though small, local boards may not be perfect, they operate with a very high level of integrity and have the knowledge to make informed decisions which may not always please everyone.

In Vermont people do not run for office to get rich, they seek election out of a sense of duty to preserve our way of life and give back to the community of which they are proud. Mandating trainings will only discourage qualified people from seeking office since their "volunteer-time" is already stretched to the max. I think that this bill as written will open up the use of state resources to field frivolous complaints on local issues. State and local resources will be spent to look into such matters. If a study has not been done already to compile statistics on the number of potential complaints that could be reviewed, and how many had merit and how many were without, I suggest that this take place before new legislation is considered or enacted.

Our town has had a Conflict of Interest Policy for a number of years and there has never been an incident where it had to be invoked to discipline anyone. I suspect this is true across the state and that there is a very low incidence of complaints being filed. If anything, more resources should be provided to the towns for helping the local boards run efficiently, not adding more state-level oversight.

I believe that it would be far less complicated, less costly, and eliminate the possibility of politically motivated bogus charges being filed, if elected officers were provided with a copy of the Municipal Ethics Code at the time of being sworn in and taking the oath of office and also signed a statement that they will abide by the Code. If they violate the Code, then they could be charged accordingly.

It does not appear that we have a problem that needs to be fixed, and my philosophy like so many other folks' is "If it ain't broke don't fix it."

Thank you for considering my thoughts on this bill.

Bradley J. Bender