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Good morning. My name is Nicole MacTavish. I am the Superintendent and Director of the Patricia A. Hannaford Regional Technical School District, and I am speaking to you today in that capacity.

Our district is one of 4 independent Regional Technical School Districts.

We operate 3 campuses, 2 in Middlebury, and a satellite campus in Vergennes.

We serve approximately 350 high school students in Pre-Technical and Technical programs, and hundreds of Adult Learners in our evening and weekend programs, mostly through our strong partnership with the University of Vermont Health Network, and Porter Hospital.

My remarks today are in response to draft bill 26-0768, the Agency of Education's proposed changes to Career Technical Education (CTE) in the State of Vermont.

On Thursday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, AOE Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders briefed a large joint legislative committee on the plan for Vermont CTE in the form of written and oral testimony, and a PowerPoint presentation.

The plan was later codified in draft bill 26-0768, "An act relating to the transformation of Vermont's career technical education governance and funding systems."

### **Testimony:**

The big takeaways from this plan are:

### **Governance:**

- The plan creates a new agency for CTE, called an Educational Service Agency (ESA).
- This will be an interim solution, moving us from what we have now, to this interim ESA, to a future state of Comprehensive High Schools across Vermont, on an unknown timeline.
- CTE centers will no longer be overseen by Boards, School Districts, Supervisory Unions, or Superintendents.
- The AOE will authorize a new CTE Educational Service Agency (ESA), and the Governor will appoint a 5-member governance Board.

- CTE professionals and programs would be employed and overseen directly by the ESA, except CTEs at Independent Schools.
- The ESA will do all of the tasks now required of AOE around CTE, except 'compliance,' which AOE would retain.
- An Executive Director would be employed to lead and run the ESA, through a process not yet defined.
- CTE Directors and staff would report to the ESA Executive Director.

#### **The New Work of the ESA:**

- The ESA assumes CTE curriculum and instruction work across the state. It would plan and conduct statewide CTE professional development, and would develop and deploy CTE curriculum.
- The ESA would coordinate CTE Special Education and English Language Learner services.
- The ESA would run statewide program-specific advisory boards for every CTE program.
- The ESA would partner with colleges, employers and sector leaders on behalf of CTE centers.
- The ESA would maintain CTE facilities (page 12, line 7).

#### **New CTE Expansion in Middle School and Early High School:**

- The ESA would expand CTE into middle schools.
- The ESA would expand CTE in high schools with new "exploratory programming," but K-12 districts will pay for staff and programs from their foundation formula funds.
- The ESA will train school counselors and career coordinators, and will require new advising, pathway planning, family understanding, and emerging local workforce opportunities.

#### **Paying for CTE ESAs:**

\$70-\$75M will be taken out of the State's Education Fund, and appropriated directly to the newly formed ESA. (Note, napkin math indicates this is less than we spend now on CTE.)

- Districts will no longer pay tuition to CTE centers.
- The ESA will determine and implement budgets for CTE centers.
- The ESA will assume all Perkins funds and distribute them "strategically."
- Funding for transportation will be "contemplated."
- Middle school programming will be planned and implemented by the ESA, but paid for by K-12 Districts' foundation formulas.

#### **Timeline:**

Fall 2027:

- ESA Executive Director hired. This process is not described.

From Fall 2027 - December 2027 (appx. 3 months from hire) the ESA Executive Director (with no staff) will:

- Convene statewide program advisory boards.
- Validate "CTE standards, equipment needs, credentialing pathways, and sector priorities"
- Launch "system design, stakeholder engagement, and operational planning"

December 2027 - July 1, 2028 (appx. 3 - 10 months from hire) the ESA Executive Director will:

- Hire all ESA central office staff
- Build the ESA organizational structure - to include:
  - Business Department (for example: ESA budget, CTE center budgets, Perkins, payroll, IRS, accounts payable & receivable)
  - Operations (for example: shared services agreements, Memorandums of Understanding, equipment, transfer of assets, OSHA, CTE labs, maintenance plans)
  - HR (many hundreds, if not over 1,000 staff at the ESA and in CTE centers across Vermont)
  - Risk Management, Liability, and Insurance
  - Negotiate Labor Agreements (teachers, CTE Directors, support staff)
  - Determine and build out IT functions, software platform, as student information and data systems
- Hire a Curricular Department and build out, disseminate, and implement the curricular resources, professional development, and assessment system for CTE programs across the state
- Initiate coordination with CTE Centers (Note: this is the first time CTE Centers or Directors are brought into the conversation)
- Coordinate SPED, ELL, 504, mental health, counseling, and other student services
- Utilize input from advisory boards to "update program standards and equipment priorities"

July 1, 2028 (12 months from Executive Director's hire.):

- The new ESA goes live.
- CTE Center leaders and faculty report to the ESA.
- The ESA runs CTE in Vermont.

### **Positives of the Plan:**

#### 1. Repealing Service Regions.

This year alone in my region, there were 141 students on waiting lists at centers to my north and south. These centers provide spectacular CTE for students, but are limited by their capacity.

- Chittenden County serves over 7000 high school students.
- Rutland County serves over 2000 high school students.
- Addison County serves only about 1200 high school students.

My center has over 200 CTE seats available. If students could move fluidly between CTE centers, more students would have access to CTE.

If Hannaford Career Center was able to serve even half of the students on waitlists, our tuition rate would decrease by 34%, and be exactly in line with other CTE centers. More student access for less taxpayer pain is a win-win.

## 2. One CTE District.

The two reports commissioned in Vermont to determine how best to scale CTE both found that a single CTE District to be the best solution for our context.

However, those reports both recommended a CTE District, with all of the powers and responsibilities of a School District. That idea has merit.

However, an ESA is not a School District. This bill details an agency without the power or authority to move the critical CTE work forward.

### **Questions and Concerns:**

1. **Governance:** In this plan, the Agency of Education stands up this new ESA (page 4, line 9), and the Governor appoints (page 17, line 11) the 5-member Board of Trustees with oversight of the ESA.

2. **Timeline:** The timeline appears ambitious and runs outside of the larger public education reform efforts. CTE cannot be changed in a vacuum. We have to be part of the larger transformation of Public Education.

3. **Underestimates the Cost of CTE:** The plan underestimates the cost of CTE in Vermont.

Basic math indicates \$75M is low. We have had no transparency about the origins of these numbers. My center budget alone is over \$6M. There are 17 centers, many much larger than mine. The math does not add up.

4. **Tying CTE funding to the National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA)** is problematic (page 23, line 2).

NIPA is a macroeconomic accounting framework designed to measure national output, not a cost index for public services like schools.

NIPA tracks:

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- National income
- Corporate profits
- Personal income
- Inflation measures

But school district costs are driven by:

- Labor costs
- Retirement systems
- Health care inflation
- Local housing markets
- Regional student needs

National GDP growth does not reliably reflect local education cost growth.

My center's FY27 budget will increase by three times the increase predicted by NIPA due to labor and healthcare costs.

5. Cuts Transportation and Salary Reimbursements: This bill eliminates transportation reimbursement, which is \$25K for us (page 24, line 15) and salary assistance, another \$180K for us (page 25, line 12). Our district would see a \$205K loss in revenue from these cuts.

**Conclusion:**

While this bill does help students by repealing CTE service regions, and explores a more statewide approach to CTE, overall, the bill is problematic based on timeline, cost, governance, and built in funding assumptions.

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