

Friday, April 25, 2025

To the Vermont House Education Committee,

I have attended public school in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont since third grade. I am currently a ninth grader at Lake Region Union High School. Without exception, my education has been an experience of tight-knit community, warmth, and compassion. My rural school and others like it across Vermont serve as vital community hubs, where youth and adults alike gather for learning, basketball games, town events, and more. Rural schools are one of the cornerstones of our united Vermont culture and small-town values. As a student in the Northeast Kingdom community, it is for reasons of community preservation and geographic impossibility that I cannot support the class and school size minimums in House Bill 454. How far is too far for rural students to travel to get to school? What education will they get when they arrive at school? Where will we teach our students when no existing schools in our region can meet these minimum school sizes?

School closure and consolidation as suggested by H.454 to meet classroom minimums will result in thousands of rural children not receiving the reliable hands-on and personalized education we have had over the past decades under the trust of local teachers who have the time and resources to get to know the personal needs of each student. In addition, many students are already on buses for significantly longer than they should be, which eats into valuable time in the personal and academic lives of students. Unnecessary reconfiguration to meet classroom and school size minimums would only worsen this problem and could lead to bussing in my community more than one or two hours each way. To protect our rural students, this bill should have included a maximum bus length of 45 minutes that would have overridden class size and school size minimums.

H.454 may be appropriate for urban and suburban counties such as Chittenden and Rutland, who have higher geographical concentrations of students and populations significantly greater than that in the Northeast Kingdom, but the consolidation of our rural schools to meet class and school size minimums would be devastating to students in Orleans County and similar rural counties which would undoubtedly experience closure with no existing school buildings large enough to house consolidation. I am of the understanding that the class size minimums proposed in H.454 would be to the exception of AP classes. However, the majority of other classes including honors and special needs classes would struggle to meet the minimums. . In each of my 9th grade honors classes so far this school year, we have had fewer than the prescribed 18 students. I do not see this as a problem. It has allowed my teachers and me to form meaningful and personal relationships which would be hindered with larger classroom sizes. With class size minimums, would rural high schools be able to offer honors classes or could only wealthier schools?

As a student, I do not see the benefit of consolidating and reconfiguring our schools for the purpose of meeting an unrealistic standard of classroom and school size. The past six years have been tumultuous as it is. I strongly urge the Vermont House Education Committee and

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whoever else may be concerned to place classroom and school minimums on a basis of town or county population, and not on an one-size-fits-all premise that is simply impossible to achieve without major disruption.

Respectfully,

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