

Testimony for the Vermont House Committee on Education

May 5, 2026 S. 214

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. For the record my name is Sharon Ellingwood, NEK Choice School District Board and Essex North Supervisory Union Board member. I reside in Lemington Vermont, population 87, and a density of 2 people per square mile. The NEK Choice School District consists of 10 towns: Norton, Lemington, Bloomfield, Brunswick, Maidstone, Guildhall, Granby, Victory, East Haven and Kirby. For scale, that is over 70% of Essex County, a huge geographic swath.

I've appreciated the thoughtful testimony in this Committee on S.214. I also want to recognize the work you're doing on broader education reform. This is a gargantuan task, and we deeply respect the effort under such pressure. The fact that you've made space for S.214 in this session's context tells our communities something simple and important: we matter. Our Act 46 work brought the NEK Choice School District together in a merger and we've built a strong, unified voice across our towns. S214 would not exist from one small town alone. Our merger is a success story. Without that collective effort, this Pre K need may have remained unaddressed.

It is meaningful to see this level of care for Pre-K access in micro-rural Vermont. This has taken more than five years of advocacy and Pre K access has not been Universal. For families who've been left out of Pre-K, this is the door opening. Families can enter the workforce, their children will be better prepared, and their futures will be stronger.

S.214 is a thoughtful and important fix for our youngest learners. When children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, outcomes improve and the need for costly interventions is reduced. This is a smart investment that benefits students, families, taxpayers, and schools.

Thank you.