

Statement of Jonathan Cooper
State Representative, Bennington-1

January 28, 2025

Good afternoon, everyone. For the record I am Jonathan Cooper, State Representative for the Bennington-1 District, which includes the towns of Woodford, Searsburg, Readsboro, Stamford, and the bulk of my hometown, Pownal. I'd like to thank you all for inviting me to join you today. While three weeks is not enough time to get to know each of you personally, I believe that I've had the opportunity to say hello to all of you since joining this Assembly on January 8.

As you are all aware, I have been represented in this committee's deliberations regarding the Bennington-1 election by Sarah Buxton of the Montpelier firm Tarrant, Gillies & Shems. I am immensely grateful to the firm for extending Ms. Buxton's services in this matter pro bono. I have had to work through many questions and scenarios since I first learned of the ballot irregularities in an 8:10 AM phone call from Jill Krowinski on November 8. Sarah has worked through them alongside me, and done so with humor, patience, and insight.

With that said, I know you've all had a chance to review the memo that Ms. Buxton prepared, outlining her thoughts on the task of constitutional interpretation that now lies before you. And in time, your interpretation will lie before the entire House. As a regional planner I don't have much to add to the contents of the memo, but I stand by the assertions therein that all of the options involving additional voting, revoting, or other ballot activities would do more harm than good... and do that harm to more voters than have been affected by the checklist errors to date and to an election process that is central to our concepts of democracy. My message to you today is that I did the work of a campaigner during campaign season, and I am now busy with the work of a legislator during the legislative session. This work is immensely gratifying, but most importantly it is the work that each of our constituents needs us to be doing. We do this work, throughout the biennium, with as much consistency as we can muster. It is this consistency that gives voters both time and a body of legislative work to evaluate the performance of their representatives when they return to the polls. Today, the people of Bennington-1 have a representative who is working hard for them, but my status is still unresolved. I ask that this

committee move swiftly to arrive at its recommendation so that the citizens of my district may enjoy the same level of surety in their representation here as your constituents have in your representation of them.

As with any new representative, this work has required me to build new relationships within this building, and to strengthen relationships between this building and the people back home. It tasks us with learning about a legislative process that has been refined through practice and precedent for more than 200 years and communicating as much of that process as we can retain in our conversations over the weekend. And as much as people under this Golden Dome talk to me - and I'd imagine to each of you - about the election, it does not command the public's attention during office hours, or in line at the gas station.

During those office hours at the Readsboro General Store, the Stamford Public Library, the Woodford General Store, and the Hill Top Farm Store, people have initiated conversations about public safety, wind energy siting, bridge replacements, local junk ordinances, bicycle lanes, minimum wage requirements, education funding, village and downtown designations, school closures, and much more. People have shared anxieties about rural depopulation, and one constituent went so far as to share a concern about hollowed-out towns: "we're gonna be Appalachia without the coal." People have asked about the work of the committee I've been assigned to, Commerce, and how important economic development options are to the five small towns in the southwestern corner of the state - and how different it looks in each of those towns.

To the extent possible, I enjoyed my campaign - with the notable exception of the sunburn I got on November 5, standing outside on an immensely and absurdly sunny day from the time the polls opened in Pownal until they closed at 7:00 PM. It was the culmination of a process that took more than a year. It proceeded through a productive spring, an immensely difficult summer, and a fall full of renewed energy, focus, and community support. In those months I stated my intentions - through meetings, stump speeches, phone calls, door-knocking, and all the other tried-and-true campaign activities - to represent all 4,413 residents to the best of my ability when the session began, and that shall remain the goal. This is in pursuit of consistency for the voters, in affirmation of the judgement pronounced by 3,129 of them on Election Day, and in support of the robust representation from a duly elected and qualified State Representative to which I believe they are becoming accustomed.

I welcome any questions you may have.

Jonathan Cooper
Vermont House of Representatives
Benn-1: Pownal, Readsboro, Searsburg, Stamford, Woodford