

2/13/26

Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Eric Montbriand, and I serve as Chair for the Wells Springs Unified Union School District. Wells Springs operates two PreK - 6 elementary schools serving the towns of Middletown Springs and Wells and is a member of the Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union.

I am here to speak about the work our board has undertaken and the impact of house education's proposed map on our communities. Since the introduction of H454, we have engaged in regular, structured conversations both within our district, Supervisory Union and with neighboring district. Specifically throughout the last year.

- We have held joint board meetings with our neighboring district to discuss common concerns and ways we might cooperate to advocate for legislative change. Jointly submitted a letter to Legislators advocating for School choice
- Communicated to the redistricting taskforce the importance of remaining in a Supervisory union structure.
- Communicated to the redistricting taskforce in a joint letter with our neighboring district advocating to preserve school choice.
- We have engaged our communities through public forums and surveys to ensure that families, educators, and taxpayers are part of the conversation.

The House Education Committee's proposed district map isn't workable for our district because it threatens both our long-standing school choice model and the supervisory union structure that allows small districts like ours to function effectively. As a PreK–6 district, we tuition our students for grades 7–12, giving families meaningful school choice while allowing us to focus resources on strong elementary programming. If we are merged into a larger, fully operating PreK–12 district under the proposed map, that choice model would be eliminated or significantly restricted, fundamentally changing what families in our district have relied upon. At the same time, eliminating supervisory unions removes the shared-services framework that already delivers efficiencies in business operations, special education, transportation coordination, and curriculum support. Supervisory unions allow small, locally governed districts to collaborate and control costs without surrendering community voice. Replacing that structure with large, consolidated districts risks centralizing decision-making farther from our towns while dismantling systems that are currently working. In our case, the proposal does not solve an existing problem—it creates new ones by forcing mergers.

Recognizing the unsustainability of the status quo, we initiated exploration into cost containment measures starting in 2023, specifically engaging in discussions regarding consolidation within our district. Moving forward with significant education reform, we are not simply asking for no change, but for a fundamental shift toward a collaborative and respectful process. Advocating for a more constructive path forward involves:

1. **Supporting and empowering existing regional service organizations** such as Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (**BOCES**) or Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (**CESAs**), which have a demonstrated capacity to pool resources, provide specialized services (like special education or technical training), and achieve efficiencies without dissolving local governance.
2. **Reinforcing the role and capacity of Supervisory Unions** to find administrative and functional efficiencies across their constituent districts while preserving individual school board

autonomy.

3. **Encouraging and facilitating genuinely voluntary mergers** where local communities, through a self-determined process, agree that consolidation is the best path forward for their specific circumstances.

This approach—one that supports collaboration and respects local choice—would be far more helpful and effective in thoughtfully and strategically reshaping education to better serve the needs of our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Montbriand
Chair, Wells Springs Unified Union School District.