

Senate Education Committee
Testimony April 10, 2026

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Lisa McCarthy
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Good afternoon and thank you for having me here today. My name is Lisa McCarthy and I am the principal of Craftsbury Schools. Craftsbury is a preK-12 public school district located in Orleans county. We have two campuses, with our elementary school, preK-2, being located in the village and the Academy campus, grades 3-12, located on Craftsbury Common. We are a member of the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union which encompasses the towns of Craftsbury, Wolcott, Hardwick, Greensboro, Stannard and Woodbury.

I want to start by thanking this committee for their continued support for rural schools in Vermont. Particularly, I want to thank you for providing a path forward for voluntary merger study committees and not forced study committees that have neighbors chosen for us. You continue to provide us with a path forward for local democracy via the supervisory union structure.

Before I speak in regards to the minimum class size requirements proposed in ACT 73, I'd like to share a snapshot of the experience at our school in Craftsbury. On Wednesday afternoon, as I left our faculty meeting and was taking a break outside in the sun before our school board meeting, I was thinking about this testimony and how to convey to you what it truly means to be a student in Craftsbury and the importance of rural, community schools. In front of me, there were over 30 middle and high school students on the Common for track practice. A group of younger students and families were streaming out of the gym leaving indoor soccer practice hosted by our regional indoor soccer club and high school students were getting ready to start softball practice in the gym as they were leaving. Our WonderKids after school enrichment program was in attendance in the common room working on an art project, Dungeons and Dragons club, hosted by two high school seniors for students in grades 5-8, was happening in the art room and our drama club, with 28 students grades 3-12 was finishing up rehearsal for our spring production of Peter Pan. As I looked around I realized that the image I saw in front of me, is exactly what I wish you could experience in person as you make these important decisions about our schools. It was 4:15pm in the afternoon and we had almost 65% of our student body, ranging from grades K-12, still on our campus and engaged in high quality afterschool programming and athletics. This is what I hope for in a rural school and most

importantly, this is what I hope for when we think of the future of rural towns in Vermont

The image above portrays a typical afternoon in Craftsbury. While we can capture data points to show the number of students participating in athletics and afterschool programs, at the state level we are not looking at data that captures what it truly feels like to be part of a community. In Craftsbury, students and community members have a sense of belonging and to have students of all ages interacting not just with each other, but with healthy adult role models who are working, and often volunteering, to make these activities happen in their community, is not just the image of a thriving school community, but also the image of a thriving rural Vermont town. The strong relational health we have intentionally built and nurtured is a sign of a strong community, but it is also a resiliency factor, for both students and adults. This is the core of what makes rural Vermont so special and unique.

Craftsbury is a town and community that deeply values education and the importance of local democracy and local decision-making. There has been tremendous support for our preK-12 school system historically and this remains true today. We currently stand out in our region as a school that has a stable school population. We are not declining in enrollment like many other schools in Vermont. As our board chair stated, there are trends in our enrollment over our 197 years that fluctuate at various grade levels. For example, we currently have a dip in our enrollment in our high school, which was projected, and is rebounding beginning last school year with class sizes in grades 6-8 that average at 22 for next school year.

In regards to the minimum class size requirements, I ask that you slow the process towards implementation of this requirement. This will allow school administrators the time needed to be thoughtful about implementation and how to meet these requirements without impacting student achievement and learning. A knee jerk reaction, with implementation beginning in September of this year, will require us to make significant changes to our master schedule and courses and I believe will lead to a situation where administrators are feeling pressure to comply with the law and are in a position where doing what is best for students is put to the side. I'd also like the committee to consider that there are currently other changes at the state level being asked of schools and administrators that

are also coming down the pipeline. One in particular that is on the horizon is the change in state-wide graduation requirements. The changes required for many schools in this area are significant and will require thought and intention around planning, staffing and budgeting. Adding more to our plates in terms of change will likely be an overwhelming amount of change.

You may think that the situation I'm describing above is only relevant to the smallest schools in the state. However, AOE data on current class sizes, demonstrates that only 6 high schools in the state are currently meeting the minimum class size requirement, and they are all in Chittenden county. I am talking about how this will impact the vast majority of our schools, not just the exceptions.

I want to be clear that I am not opposed to change at the state level in regards to education. I think change needs to happen. However, I believe that ACT 73, as it was originally presented in the last legislative session, has impacts that disproportionately impact rural schools and communities. Specifically, I have concerns about the quick turnaround on implementation of minimum class sizes and the continued conversation around forced consolidation. I have significant concerns that a change in our school district governance structure would not only significantly impact our school in Craftsbury, but would have far reaching impacts on our ability to maintain viable rural towns across the state of Vermont.

In closing, I want to remind the committee of my board chair's testimony previously on the historical averages of class sizes and enrollment in Craftsbury. We have been able to maintain viable class sizes, and in the current area we fall short, at our high school level, we are projected to increase in class size numbers due to the natural ebb and flow of the population. We, like you, believe that maintaining adequate class sizes is important and we will work to adjust our resources accordingly to ensure that we are providing the best possible learning environment for students, while also balancing fiscal responsibility.

I thank you for your time today.