

Hello, thank you for taking time to listen to me.

My name is Mark Brown. I am a resident of East Calais, and I teach English and Journalism at U-32 where I support students as they find their voice through everything from research papers to poetry chapbooks to political zines.

In addition to my teaching load, I advise MOST Club, a young men's group that examines what masculinity means and should mean in our lives. I also advise the school newspaper. Both of these groups are doing good work in difficult times. MOST Club recently joined with two other student groups on campus to offer a school wide presentation on Title IX. Journalism has covered a variety of campus issues both silly and serious. Recently, they published an article on the needs of special educators and the students they support. A version of that article made it to a regular mini-edition of our paper that students prepare for publication in the Times Argus as part of their In the Schools Initiative. To make our budget work and to avoid the excess spending penalty, our district is cutting funding for the stipends that pay teachers for advising these kinds of groups. I think we'll keep doing this work without this pay, but is that sustainable? Hard budget caps would only intensify these types of dilemmas. Please oppose S.220.

Outside my work with students, I serve as co-president of our local association. Beyond the regular work on behalf of colleagues and students that this role requires, we've begun organizing in response to concerns about ICE and CPB actions. In collaboration with our board and central office, we're beginning to make districtwide plans not just for if they come into our building but also for if they target students during athletic events or field trips. From what I've heard, student groups also are organizing and advocating around these issues. We could use your support in managing this at the statewide level.

In our district, music education is beloved, engaging 100% of elementary students in addition to many of our middle and high school students, including both of my sons. However, music is facing cuts at all levels. We're left deciding as a district whether we will offer general music or band and chorus at the elementary level. We cannot afford both. Similar cuts in recent years have caused our district to remove Spanish from the one elementary school that still offered it. Again, hard budget caps would only intensify these types of cuts. Please oppose S.220. Switching from property taxes to progressive income taxes to fund public education could move some of the burden from working and middle class Vermonters to those most able to pay more. Please support S.104. Finally, requiring those who receive the same dollars to follow the same rules could keep our education dollars where they are most efficiently used, our public schools.

In our schools, we're doing good work in hard times. We need your help.

Thank you for your time.

Best,
Mark Brown
East Calais