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**Public Hearing on Student Weighting Calculations**

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Via Zoom

Thank you for making the time to allow public comment and for welcoming me to the public hearing to provide a perspective as a father, educator, and citizen-taxpayer of Vermont. I also want to thank you for accepting the responsibility you have taken as members of this committee to understand and support an empirically generated and equitable funding solution to Vermont's antiquated system of allocating funds based on arbitrarily quantified values of student needs. Your challenging task is to correct an outdated system.

The Rutland perspective is one that is becoming more common around Vermont. We have an increase in students from poverty and ELL students. As an example where I served as Principal, at Northwest Primary School in Rutland, from 2000-2007 the percentage of students whose families live in poverty has increased from about 50%, when I started in 2000, to 81% in the current fiscal year (according to the VT AOE FRL %). That shift makes Northwest the third poorest school in the state, behind St. Albans City and Woodford Hollow. In a fiscal year when we cut our budget by \$800,000 and maintained a per-pupil spending below state average we still incurred a significant homestead tax rate increase (from \$1.51 per hundred of valuation to \$1.64).

During the past 20 years or more, we have all witnessed and worked to support our students who live in poverty and are less likely to have the important, enriching early experiences and good health that more affluent families may benefit from. In Rutland we have added agreements with our local designated agency, increased our counseling and service contingent, and created more alternative and individualized learning spaces. All of that has occurred within an arbitrary and antiquated weighting system that shifts the increased expenses onto taxpayers who can least afford it. The scenario has played out in communities across Vermont.

I understand there is a consideration of a "Categorical Aid" scenario. There is no empirical basis for such aid. It may end up being as arbitrary as the current weighting formula. Perhaps the biggest risk of an arbitrary categorical aid scenario is that it is subject to

change at without much warning or evidence, leaving the education system to make a best guess at what is real, and how to plan for educational programs and staffing. As a frugal and responsible district, we in Rutland City would be unable to create a viable long-term strategic plan for programming, capital expenses, and budgeting using categorical aid. We must plan thoughtfully.

I ask on behalf of the students of Rutland City, **and** the students across the state, that this committee promote the full adoption of the recommendations of the UVM Weighting study. It is the correct thing to do in state that prides itself on supporting all its students.

