

Statement for 10/29 Hearing

Hello, my name is Cathy Solsaa and I am a resident of Rutland City, a member of the Rutland City Public School Board and a member of the Coalition for Vermont Student Equity. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation to my community. We have been underfunded for decades, while still trying to meet state mandates and provide necessary programs to meet our students' needs.

The inequity in Vermont's educational funding system is something that we in Rutland City have recognized and lived with for decades. Inequity has grown and become more burdensome with every year, as overall wealth disparities have increased. The number of economically disadvantaged and often-times traumatized students make up a significant portion of our enrollment. The true cost of meeting our students' needs exceeds the current weighting system. Now, finally, a study commissioned by the legislature and conducted by experts illuminated the problem with indisputable data. AND it offers a data driven solution with specific weighting recommendations to remedy funding disparities. With this new system, we'd be able to provide our students with the support they need, no matter their economic status or where they were born, to reach their potential and become responsible, engaged citizens. We no longer would worry about passing an increased budget to already highly-taxed property owners or taking money from the Gen Ed fund.

It's so disheartening to watch this effort to humanize our educational funding system begin to disintegrate with the proposal to pull ELL weights out of the formula and use categorical grants instead. Why is the Task Force questioning what these scholars and scientists advise? It's specifically stated in the report that the formula needs to be taken as a whole. Primary to the study's focus was economically-disadvantaged students, ELL students, and secondary level students. Remove one weight, and it affects all the other factors.

To remove ELL students from the equation is to change the outcome. I assert that the Task Force doesn't have the background that matches the experts who developed the new weights. Additionally, the Task Force does not appear to have any empirical data driving the \$25,000 + \$5,000 proposal, AND the proposal does nothing to address the underlying issue of pupil weighting inequity. It is fair to say that categorical aid will continue to support the framework of racism, classism and systemic inequity on many levels.

The Task Force is running simulations of what funding would look like with ELL categorical grants and current data. As responsible legislators, you must also model what the funding would look like following the study's recommendations. In the name of transparency, you need to use Simulation B1 to show the weights based on current school-level data and share the results, so this essential information can be part of the public dialogue.

In Vermont, our system of funding education is not equitable. This is not the question. The question is how we will address the issues brought to light in the study. To apply categorical aid is to keep the blinders on and deny the inherent classism and racism that result from our educational funding policies. We will all win if we have a system where every student gets what they need to become a successful and engaged member of their community. Please, support implementing a new weighting system as recommended by the Pupil Weighting Factors Report. Thank you for your time and attention.