

Subject: Act 73: From Lunenburg, VT Resident

Dear Vermont Senators and Legislators,

It is disheartening to have to write this letter, as I had sincerely hoped that the legislation would not move forward once lawmakers considered the unique circumstances of small northern Vermont communities like ours.

The changes proposed through Act 73 would have significant, harmful impacts on our children - who are our future - and on the communities that work hard to support and guide them.

Our small town of Lunenburg has experienced its share of educational challenges over the years, including those brought by Act 46. My husband and I ultimately chose private education (for our children's elementary years) in New Hampshire for a variety of reasons, after feeling that the existing options within the Vermont system did not offer the educational environment needed for them to reach their full potential. While the purpose of this letter is not to revisit these circumstances- I felt it appropriate to highlight.

Our responsibility is to love and care for our children, and the hurdles you'd be presenting with Act 73 would be deeply concerning. The harmful consequences to children and families due to travel times alone warrants a multi-page letter. While there is a lot to say regarding the numerous obstacles presented- I'd like to focus specifically on high school choice, and how essential it is for families in our community.

I encourage you to locate Lunenburg on a map. It is a very small town situated directly along the Vermont-New Hampshire border, and many people outside our region may not realize how interconnected our communities are. For years, Lunenburg has been closely tied to the White Mountains Regional School District in New Hampshire. Many of our students attend White Mountains Regional High School. Our families work together, partner together, and raise our children as part of a shared community that spans the state line.

The proposed changes would have profound consequences for our town. First, they would divide a community that has long functioned as one. Lunenburg is a rural town with very limited local resources. The nearest town that provides everyday essentials such as a grocery store, pharmacy, employment opportunities, sports & youth programming, and many community services is Lancaster, New Hampshire - just ten minutes away. Because of this, the Lunenburg and Lancaster communities are not simply neighbors; they function as a single, interdependent community. Students who have grown up with friends, teachers, and programs in New Hampshire would suddenly be forced to leave that environment during some of the most formative years of their lives. The disruption to their academic and social stability would be significant.

For some families - including mine - the only alternative would be to relocate outside of Vermont in order to preserve the educational path we believe is best for our children. The responsibility is ours to guide and support our children so they may grow into successful members of society, and education plays an irreplaceable role in that. Educational experiences, communities, and opportunities are not interchangeable, and the paths families choose for their children matter. If Vermont removes the long-standing parental right to choose this educational path, the only way for our family to keep our children enrolled in the White Mountains Regional School District would be to relocate to New Hampshire.

Reasonable access to education is essential. Parents' rights matter. Families matter. My husband and I know the educational path needed in order for our kids to succeed, and to be stripped of the right to choose would signal VT lawmakers' strong disregard for the rights and roles of parents.

While it may be easy for you to read this and toss it aside in the pile of other letters stating similar things- you need to know that you would not be simply tossing a piece of paper to the side- rather, you'd be tossing a community to the side.

Thank you for your time,

Jillian Colby
Lunenburg, VT