To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

From: Vita-Learn, a non-profit organization representing Ed Tech professionals in VT

Date: March 12, 2026

Subject: Written testimony in opposition to H.650 - An act relating to educational technology products

Introduction

Vita-Learn represents Vermont's educational technology leaders, dedicated to the effective and safe use of digital tools in our schools. While we share H.650's commitment to student data privacy, we have concerns about its intent to strengthen the efficacy of education technology products, and how it has an underlying goal of addressing screen time in a more general sense.

A noted intent of the bill is worthy; protect student data privacy, ensure that entities schools contract with abide by a code of conduct, and provide some clearing house for vetting these contracted entities. It has been pointed out in testimony during February, that in fact, many schools have been working towards this for the past 8 years or so, with success.

As highlighted in recent testimony by both Jeff Wallis, Director of Technology and Network Engineering at Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District, and Patricia Aigner, Director of Technology for Rutland City Schools, Vermont already possesses a robust, nationally recognized solution for data privacy through the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC). As originally introduced, H.650 proposed the development of a new state-run certification process by another State entity that could dismantle the progress made by this existing process and create significant regulatory and administrative burden. We hope that at this point, it is apparent that schools are, in fact, doing this work with fidelity, and what might be most helpful would be to find a way to expand this work and support it for ALL schools.

Key Concerns

Efficacy of software programs, platforms, and applications has always been a concern in schools. It is also often defined best by the user of a program, platform, or application. Teachers are really best suited to make that judgement and in fact, we see often that teachers reject a particular tool if it does not produce the results the teachers sought. We urge that the sponsors of this bill continue to let teachers and education professionals, in the schools, make that judgment. As currently written, H.650 has an overly broad definition of "educational technology products" with a vague scope covering any and all student facing software used for teaching that "may collect, process, or transmit student data". As Mr. Wallis noted in his testimony this definition risks capturing general productivity tools such as Google Docs, used widely to help students collaborate on projects, and specialized software such as the Adobe Suite and Corel Vector, both of which are key components of digital arts programs in our Vermont schools.How would an outside entity, such as the Secretary of State's office, go about vetting these titles for certification; what criteria would the office develop and could it be fairly and universally applied? Consider too, mentioned in Mr. Wallis's testimony, the costs that

would be turned back on the school districts if vendors need to pay an additional fee to be part of the certification process, proposed in earlier versions.

Screen time is also of a concern in a general sense, and yes, how do we manage this? Again, schools are very aware of this and teachers work hard to balance this in their classrooms. Where I believe the sponsors see more of an issue is with screen time out of the classroom. Schools can address this to a degree, but this is a parental issue as well. Set limits at home, urge teachers to send paper/book materials for homework. Adopt and manage tools that some districts have in place to help parents block content while students are at home. Using screen time as a blanket concern to then limit teachers' use of technology tools for learning is governing from “outside”, which is difficult and puts undue burden on schools to manage.

Lastly, with all of these aspects, how would any of this be overseen? Who determines a particular school district is “over the limit” on its screen time? How is efficacy measured and can it be generalized across a wide breadth of titles? How would an entity operating outside of a school environment deem something to not meet standards? What criteria would be established, and even if teachers were involved, how many committee hours would it take in an already busy day for teachers and staff?

Conclusion

We urge the committee to reconsider the creation of a new state certification workflow and instead work in partnership to utilize existing, proven frameworks. Organizations such as The Education Cooperative (TEC) provide access to expert legal review, constant monitoring of vendor terms, and vendor accountability for a small per student fee and many Vermont schools are already utilizing their services. Work to expand this, and if need, yes, require schools to be working towards the privacy work many do already. By working with existing organizations and frameworks Vermont can achieve high levels of security around student data privacy without the ambiguities, costs, and potential instructional disruptions likely to be caused by H.650 as currently drafted. Take screen time and efficacy as separate issues and consider recommendations that are updated regularly and based on sound education practice. Involve education entities that work closely on standards, and practices that best support high quality student learning.

Thank you

Signed

Walter Ripley, Chair, Vita-Learn Board, Data, Assessment and Technology Coordinator at Slate Valley Unified School District

Peter Drescher, Vice Chair, Vita-Learn Board, Director of Technology and Innovation at Essex Westford School District

Jon Rice, Northeast Representative, Vita-Learn Board, Director of Operations, Kingdom East School District