RE: Inequity Concern from Constituent

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing today as a former educator with decades of experience in Vermont's classrooms. After nearly 40 years of teaching in Vermont schools, I retired and continued in the profession as a consultant for UVM's Vt Reads Institute and saw firsthand the disparity of resources in economically disadvantaged schools. Having spent my career witnessing the profound impact that stable, equitable funding has on a child's future, I am deeply unsettled by the current trajectory of our state's education landscape.

The recent round of 2026 school budget votes has once again highlighted a disturbing "tale of two Vermonts." While affluent districts continue to pass their budgets with relative ease, our economically disadvantaged communities are seeing their budgets fail. This trend is not a coincidence; it is a symptom of a systemic failure to decouple a child's educational quality from their zip code's property wealth and socioeconomic status.

Beyond the immediate funding crisis, I am particularly alarmed by the redistricting maps currently under consideration. Based on my review, there is a significant risk that Vermont is moving toward combining already disadvantaged districts. This path does not lead to "efficiency"—it leads to the institutionalized segregation of Vermont students by class.

Key Concerns for the Committee's Consideration:

- Compounding Disadvantage: When we merge low-income districts, we concentrate poverty and limit the resources available to the very students who require the most support. This creates "islands of struggle" that lack the tax base to recover.

- The "Affluence Gap": We are witnessing an erosion of the promise of Act 60/68. If the current trend continues, Vermont will transition from a state of educational equity to one defined by a tiered system where student success is determined by parental income.

- Educator Retention: As a former teacher, I can tell you that instability in budgets leads to an exodus of talent. Our most vulnerable schools will find it increasingly impossible to attract and retain the high-quality educators their students deserve.

I understand the immense pressure the Committee is under to manage rising costs and a complex funding formula. However, administrative convenience or short-term cost-saving measures must not come at the cost of our students' civil rights. Redrawing lines that further isolate disadvantaged populations is a regression that Vermont cannot afford.

I urge the Committee to pause and rigorously analyze the long-term socioeconomic impact of these proposed maps. We must ensure that any restructuring prioritizes integration and equity rather than furthering the divide.

Our students—all of them—deserve a system that views their potential as equal. I hope you will keep these concerns at the forefront of your deliberations.

If you are ever in need of my testimony or further elaboration, it would be my honor and privilege to appear before the committee.

Sincerely,

Maggie Eaton

Former Vermont Educator

Sent: Monday, March 9, 2026 5:58 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your responses to my previous correspondence. I am writing to provide specific examples of the disparities I have observed between neighboring districts.

The Washington Central Unified Union School District (WCUUSD) recently approved a FY 2027 budget with per-pupil spending of $16,372.81, a 7.21% increase from the previous year. In contrast, the Barre Unified Union School District's proposed FY 2026 budget of approximately $12,982 per pupil was recently rejected. As the district returns to the drawing board to pass a budget, that figure will likely decrease further.

Despite being only a few miles apart, student access to resources in these two districts is not equal. Having taught in both for many years, I have seen how higher salaries and better resources in Washington Central allow educators to remain there for their entire careers. Meanwhile, Barre faces frequent and significant teacher turnover.

Current redistricting maps suggest merging Montpelier with Washington Central, while Barre would merge with Williamstown, Northfield, and Orange—districts

characterized by higher academic needs and lower per capita income. This alignment threatens to institutionalize a tiered system. Vermont prides itself on the quality of its public schools, and we must ensure we do not mirror states where educational quality is dictated by a family's ability to move to an affluent area.

Thank you for your continued time and consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

Maggie Eaton