Testimony of Mark Koenig
Chair, Addison Northwest School District Board
Before the Senate Committee on Education

For the record, my name is Mark Koenig and I am the Chair of the Addison Northwest School District school board. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senator Bongartz's proposed redistricting map and the broader direction of Vermont's education governance reform. I offer these comments from the perspective of a local school board chair charged with balancing educational quality, fiscal responsibility, and community trust. While I appreciate the effort to move this conversation forward, I have significant concerns that the current proposal does not meaningfully improve upon the system it seeks to replace.

At its core, the proposed redistricting map appears to preserve, rather than transform, Vermont's existing supervisory union governance framework. This raises a fundamental concern: if the goal of redistricting is to simplify governance, improve accountability, and create more coherent systems of decision-making, it is unclear how maintaining layered governance structures achieves that outcome.

Supervisory unions have historically served a purpose, particularly in supporting smaller districts. However, they have also contributed to fragmentation, diffuse accountability, and inefficiencies in decision-making. A reform effort that largely replicates these structures risks reinforcing the very challenges that policymakers have long sought to address. If Vermont is to undertake significant structural change, it should result in clearer lines of authority, more direct accountability to voters, and a governance model that is easier, not harder, for communities to understand.

A second major concern is the absence of meaningful restructuring regarding the role and regulation of independent schools within Vermont's publicly funded education system. Vermont's longstanding tuitioning model, while rooted in history and local choice, operates within a regulatory framework that differs significantly from that which is required of public schools. Any comprehensive reform effort should take a hard look at these differences – particularly in areas such as accountability, transparency, and financial oversight. The current proposal does not appear to address these disparities in a substantive way. Without reexamining how independent schools are integrated into the publicly funded system, the state risks perpetuating inequities and inconsistencies that complicate both governance and fiscal stewardship.

Third, one of the primary drivers behind governance reform is the expectation of improved efficiency and cost containment. However, it is not evident that this proposed redistricting map would generate meaningful savings compared to the current system. Maintaining existing structures suggests that administrative costs, staffing configurations, and service delivery models would remain largely unchanged. Without clear mechanisms for consolidation, shared services expansion, or structural streamlining, it is difficult to identify where significant savings would be realized. In the absence of demonstrated fiscal benefits, the proposal risks imposing

the disruption of change without delivering the financial relief that Vermont taxpayers and communities are seeking.

Most importantly, this proposal does not clearly articulate how it would improve educational outcomes for Vermont students. Governance reform should ultimately be judged by its impact on students: stronger academic outcomes, expanded opportunities, improved equity, and better support systems. Yet the current framework appears focused primarily on structural alignment rather than educational advancement.

It is unclear that the proposed configuration would enhance curriculum offerings, improve student achievement, or address persistent challenges such as declining enrollment, staffing shortages, or disparities in access to programs. If the state is to undertake significant reorganization, it must be driven by a clear and compelling vision for how students will benefit, not simply by changes to governance boundaries.

Vermont has an opportunity to thoughtfully reconsider how its education system is organized and delivered. That work is both necessary and urgent. However, meaningful reform requires more than redrawing lines on a map; it requires a clear departure from structures that have proven inefficient, a willingness to address long-standing inconsistencies in the system, and a focus on measurable improvements for students.

As currently presented, this proposal raises more questions than it answers. I respectfully urge this Committee to continue its work with a focus on:

- Simplifying governance and strengthening accountability,
- Ensuring consistent oversight across all publicly funded schools,
- Identifying and delivering tangible cost savings, and
- Centering student outcomes as the primary measure of success.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your continued commitment to Vermont's students and communities.