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Vermont Senate Education Committee

Dear Senators,

April 17, 2024

Due to the uncertainty that we will be provided an opportunity to offer feedback on the Governor’s appointment of the Secretary of Education, we are writing to share our concerns regarding the appointment of Zoie Saunders as the next Vermont Secretary of Education.

The Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) believes that it is critical for the next Secretary of Education to have a demonstrated commitment to advancing equitable, high-quality education for all, and extensive experience in public education as either a teacher, principal, or superintendent. We are extremely concerned that Ms. Saunders does not have the requisite experience in public education and instead the substantial majority of her experience in education has been with a for-profit charter school organization. This raises significant questions about her ability to effectively advocate for and lead Vermont’s public education system now and into the future. Further, education leaders are anxious that the appointee will come to Vermont and further privatize our education system.

As you prepare your confirmation report for the full Senate, we ask that Ms. Saunders provide answers to the following questions:

1. Although Vermont’s education system includes tuitioning in a select number of towns, the vast majority of Vermont’s students are served by public schools. What experience and background does Ms. Saunders have to assure the public school education community that she understands the unique issues and challenges they face?
2. Should charter schools serve students in Vermont? If so, under what protections?

3. How can you ensure the best and most appropriate use of public funds for education in Vermont?
4. The Agency of Education is currently struggling to meet the data needs of school districts and communities throughout the state. What skills and experience does Ms. Saunders bring to the job that will improve the data collection, analysis and reporting of the Agency?
5. The Agency of Education is currently struggling to meet the requirements associated with Vermont's receipt of federal funding for special education. What experience does Ms. Saunders have with federal and state funding in support of students who need additional support?
6. The Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group has reviewed Vermont's education standards and recommended updates in an effort to fully recognize the historical and present-day contributions of different ethnic and social groups. How does Ms. Saunders see these updates benefiting Vermont's public education system as a whole?

The next Secretary of Education will have a profound effect on the future of Vermont's public education system and the children, families and communities that it serves and we cannot afford to watch Vermont's public education system slip away.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Flor Diaz Smith", written over a light grey dotted grid background.

Flor Diaz Smith
VSBA President

Cc: Senator Philip Baruth, President Pro Tempore