

Thank you madam chair, and everybody; I am Ken Fredette, from Wallingford. We appreciate this opportunity to speak. And I say "we", because I am a member of the steering committee of the Friends of Vermont Public Education - savevtpubliced.org - and I speak as a representative of that group today.

We know you have to provide preliminary recommendations for consideration during the forthcoming legislative session. On that very tight schedule, we respectfully suggest that, at a bare minimum, this commission insist that private schools show us their books. For one thing, it is a daunting challenge in itself to construct a plan to reel in costs while still providing solid educational opportunities for all children, but to do so without a clear understanding of what those costs actually are make that challenge virtually impossible.

We have heard private schools lament that it would cost too much to provide detailed financial information, and yet they are siphoning money away from our public schools that are required to provide those details line by line, every year. And it is woefully insufficient to simply provide the bottom line, because it is also reported that tuition rates for some entities are multi-tiered depending upon who is footing the bill. That is, in some cases higher rates are charged for students attending with taxpayer support than those being paid for by parents/guardians. Taxpayers have the right to know how their money is being spent.

We can talk about things like equity, compliance with anti-discrimination laws, and student achievement down the road, and hopefully not *too* much further down the road, mind you - but since this commission was created in response to rising property tax rates, we submit that total financial transparency by any group accepting public monies is an obvious starting point for you to build your work upon.

I wish you all the very best with your task here, and again, I am ready, willing, and able to assist by serving on a subcommittee, or in any capacity you find appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken