

THE HILLSBORO-DEERING FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
AFT#2348, AFT-NH, AFL-CIO

A. Luhtjarv - President  
K. Channon - V. President



S. Martin – Treasurer  
G. McLay – Secretary

*“Serving those who serve our students.”*

April 2, 2017

Honorable Rick Ladd, Chairman  
House Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 207  
33 North State Street  
Concord, NH 03304

RE: Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 193

Dear Honorable Chairman Ladd and Members of the Committee,

I am a local educator and registered Republican resident of Rindge, NH. I am writing today asking you to defeat Senate Bill 193. I started teaching high school in 2001. While teaching has always been a difficult task, trying to get through to teenagers that learning about US History, Economics, Psychology and Geography are important and relevant to their lives. That job has become increasingly even more difficult over the past 16 years as student populations become more entitled and apathetic, and as the rate of special education, substance use and other mental health needs skyrocket, without an equivalent increase in services. Many of our students come from disadvantaged homes and school is a safe haven for them that provides a hot meal twice a day, adults that care about them and a degree of normalcy. We are asked to make magic happen in classes that, in some cases, exceed 25-26 students. Additionally, every year we teachers face the prospect of deeper and unending budget cuts that host debates by citizens who use our profession as a target of anger for their high tax bills. We are fighting to preserve the American Dream of education being our country's great equalizer. I grew up poor, but was able to climb up into the middle class through my education and hard work.

I attended a Catholic school myself in my youth, but have dedicated my life to teaching in a public school setting, which offers the equivalent level of education of anything I experienced in my K-12 years. Despite teaching in a small school in a lower socioeconomic district, we are able to offer several successful AP and college courses, as well as award winning music and business programs. All of this success and opportunity is threatened by SB 193. Despite the bill titles of “Education Freedom Savings Accounts”, these bills will remove much-needed dollars from our public schools. Every dollar will need to be replaced by even higher taxes to keep our doors open, or, more likely, by position cuts. There are already other ways to help offset these tuition costs, through work study and other means of financial aid. Don't hurt the majority of students and taxpayers to provide a small minority of people in the state with an additional and unnecessary benefit. The majority of students remaining in public schools would have fewer classes to choose from due to layoffs, fewer co-curricular and extracurricular programs to participate in, and less technology with which to achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

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Lastly, these schools are not subject to the same degree of oversight or regulation, meaning that there is no mechanism to ensure that these dollars are even going to quality educational providers. This also means that these alternatives can also deny students they don't want to educate, based on a whole host of criteria. I don't want to live in that type of state, where tax dollars go to support exclusionary practices. My school has made it work and produced results with its tenuous financial situation each year in the recent past. One more shock to the system, though, threatens any stability and success we have been able to demonstrate against the odds. All of this is at risk with these 'freedom accounts' that fund alternatives that have not demonstrated substantive academic improvement.

Public education is the great equalizer. It gives ALL the ability to work hard, advance themselves and secure a stable future. Please help defeat SB 193 and protect our public schools. Please do not make the difficult task of educating today's youth any harder than it already is. Please ensure the continued success of my students and my own children enrolled in public schools by voting no on SB-193.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Richard (Alex) Luhtjarv (R)  
Rindge, NH Resident & Parent  
President, Hillsboro-Deering Federation of Teachers