

Dear Honorable Ms. Samuelson,

Thank you for your service in ensuring safe and improved rules governing independent schools in Vermont.

We appreciate and value your efforts to keep safe and inclusive school choice an option for families with children needing flexible pathways to learning life independence and purpose.

As a new (moved to VT 1/22) Ludlow resident, with a family with school age students, I would like to personally appeal to you to put ESBR's latest application forward in the June docket for school choice consideration.

We value and support flexible educational choices for our children. Due to mental health distress in public schools in the D.C. area, we needed what ESBR provides. We have been working to obtain services and support in public schools for our children for over 11 years. Rest assured that our son was not able to attend school even with IEPs. We exhausted all possibilities before coming to Vermont. We had private full-time tutoring, coops, public schools (self-enclosed and general ed), 2-day and 1-day school communities as well as homeschooling. Nothing worked with a resultant 14-month school refusal period with our then 15 year old teen. We were scared he wouldn't make it to his 16th birthday due to his mental health challenges (pre-existing but also exacerbated by COVID and virtual learning). Forced school attendance wasn't even on the table as we addressed his mental health needs.

Since becoming full-time residents, moving our family to VT after 20 years in the D.C. area, and joining the ESBR family, our 17 year old neurodiverse son has re-engaged with learning. More importantly, he is more hopeful for his future. We firmly believe it was due to the flexible model of ESBR's educational approach that allowed him the safe space, the time to recover from past school trauma, and grow as a person and student. Beyond academics, he is getting a driver's license, has secured a summer camp counselor job, and is looking at academic coursework for next year. He is set to graduate next year if ESBR remains a school option.

I realize ESBR may not have everything you are seeking for an independent school, but where do our children who need more space and time go to learn?

You, yourself, have stated that "practice tends to be less confrontational and more collaborative, and [you] enjoy finding creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems." Even though our son has proven more than capable of succeeding academically, he needed space to address mental health challenges before reentering in-person learning. Sadly, that would not have been a possibility within the Mill River or Green Mountain High School environments.

ESBR saved our son, as a learner, but more so as a person. Without school choice dollars for schools like ESBR, our family's ability (and many other parents of neurodiverse learners in the Ludlow community I've gotten feedback from) to launch our children toward successful lives beyond 12th grade is in serious jeopardy.

It is for the above reasons that we hope you will support this 3-year old school, which has been tirelessly (with piecemeal funding through the town of Ludlow, and private citizens fundraisers for 3 years) standing in the gap for students, like our son, who would otherwise be unable to thrive in the traditional public school offerings available in this state.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to hear more about our story or further details about support our son has received at ESBR.

I've attached a copy of my written testimony from today's meeting at Rutland High School as well as a written testimony from my 17 y.o., who was in attendance but too shy to speak, for your reference. I scribed for him following the meeting.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Becky Wynne Ludlow, VT resident and parent to a rising senior, a rising freshman at ESBR, and future middle school student at Ludlow Elementary School