

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Members of the Senate Ethics Committee,

I am lodging an ethics complaint against Senator Scott Beck for contacting the Cabot and Danville School Boards and pressuring them to close their high schools before January 1, 2026. As a current employee of St. Johnsbury Academy, an approved independent school in the State of Vermont that receives public tuition dollars from Vermont taxpayers, I believe Senator Beck violated ethical standards set forth in 3 V.S.A. Chapter 31, Governmental Ethics.

The violations include:

- **§ 1203** – Conflict of interest; appearance of conflict of interest
- **§ 1203b** – Appearance of unethical conduct
- **§ 1203d** – Misuse of position

Applicability

3 V.S.A. § 1202, *State Code of Ethics; applicability*, outlines who is covered by this statute. Section (a) states:

“Unless excluded under this section, the Code of Ethics applies to all public servants.”

That same chapter further defines public servant:

“Public servant” means an individual elected or appointed to serve as a State officer, an individual elected or appointed to serve as a member of the General Assembly, a State employee, an individual appointed to serve on a State board or commission, or an individual who in any other way is authorized to act or speak on behalf of the State.

As a public servant elected to the General Assembly, Senator Beck is clearly covered by this statute.

Affiliation with St. Johnsbury Academy

In his [Senate disclosure form](#), Senator Beck indicated that he is employed by St. Johnsbury Academy. In addition, the Academy’s [faculty page](#) lists Senator Beck as a social studies teacher. St. Johnsbury Academy is [an approved independent school in Vermont](#) and also operates a [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) center](#).

Violations

§ 1203. Conflict of interest; appearance of conflict of interest

This statute states:

“In the public servant’s official capacity, the public servant shall avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest. The appearance of a conflict shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable individual with knowledge of the relevant facts.”

Section § 1201(5) defines conflict of interest as:

“A direct or indirect interest of a public servant or such an interest, known to the public servant, of a member of the public servant’s immediate family, or of a business associate, in the outcome of a particular matter pending before the public servant or the public servant’s public body, or that is in conflict with the proper discharge of the public servant’s duties. ‘Conflict of interest’ does not include any interest that is not greater than that of other individuals generally affected by the outcome of a matter.”

Combined, these provisions set a low threshold for identifying a conflict and a high obligation for the public servant to avoid it. The determination is not made by the legislator, their peers, or legal counsel. It is made by a reasonable person with relevant knowledge.

In late spring 2025, during final negotiations over Act 73 in the Committee of Conference, a provision was introduced that would have restricted school choice for districts closing their schools—limiting tuition payments to public schools only. This provision was ultimately removed, largely due to opposition from Senator Beck, who later publicly claimed sole credit for its removal. ([Appendix A: Senator Beck Column - Caledonian Record 10/10/2025](#)).

In August 2025, [Senator Beck approached me and the chair of the Cabot School Board with new information](#). He warned that the General Assembly was likely to reintroduce and pass the same restriction, potentially making it retroactive to January 1, 2026. He urged us to hold a public board vote on school closure before December 31, 2025, if we wanted to preserve the option of tuitioning students to independent schools.

Although Senator Beck provided no evidence for his claims, I took them seriously and raised the issue at the Danville School Board meeting on September 2. After the meeting, Senator Beck texted me: “I think you should let the voters have their say. Takes all the pressure off the board.”

On September 9, he followed up with another text: “How’s that 3rd and 4th vote coming along?”—a reference to two undecided Danville board members. Then, on September 11, he asked, “Does Danville School District follow Robert’s Rules?” At that point, it became clear that Senator Beck was not merely sharing information - he was actively encouraging the board to vote on school closure. ([Appendix B: text message exchange between myself and Senator Beck](#))

While Cabot considered but ultimately declined to survey its community, ([Appendix C: Cabot Petition](#)), Danville received a formal petition ([Appendix D: Danville Petition](#)) requesting a public vote on whether to close the high school. A town-wide referendum is now scheduled for December 6, 2025, to decide whether the district will cease operating its high school and instead offer tuition vouchers to families. The petition was organized by a local parent who also teaches at St. Johnsbury Academy—the independent school most likely to receive Danville’s tuition students if the high school closes. This connection highlights the potential financial benefit to Senator Beck’s employer and raises concerns about a conflict of interest.

The pattern of Senator Beck’s outreach is also notable. Of the three small high schools in the Caledonia Supervisory Union—Cabot, Danville, and Twinfield—only Cabot and Danville were contacted. These two are geographically closest to St. Johnsbury Academy and most likely to send students there. Twinfield, farther away, would more likely send students to U-32 or Montpelier High School if it closed. Senator Beck did not contact Twinfield.

Given this, Senator Beck cannot credibly claim to be acting on behalf of all small schools statewide. He contacted only two, and one—Cabot—is not even in his district. The only clear link between the schools he approached is their proximity to his employer.

§ 1203b. Appearance of unethical conduct

“A public servant shall avoid any actions creating the appearance that the public servant is violating the Code of Ethics. Whether particular circumstances create an appearance that the Code of Ethics has been violated shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable individual with knowledge of the relevant facts.”

Senator Beck used his position and legislative influence to advance a narrative and push for a school board vote that could result in more publicly funded students for his employer. His statements, unsupported by legislative evidence, could lead to the closure of public high schools and increased tuition revenue for St. Johnsbury Academy. This would represent a financial gain for the institution and a misuse of his official position. These actions would help to ensure financial stability for his employer and represent an abuse of Senator Beck’s official elected position for both personal and potentially financial gain.

§ 1203d. Misuse of position

“A public servant shall not use the public servant’s official position for personal or financial gain.”

Senator Beck leveraged his official position as a high ranking state Senator together with his inside knowledge of the legislative issues likely to come before the General Assembly to coerce two school districts to consider preemptively closing their schools in order to maintain the option to tuition students to St. Johnsbury Academy. These actions would help to ensure financial stability for his employer and are an abuse of Senator Beck’s official elected position for both personal and potentially, financial gain.

Conclusion

Senator Beck's actions represent a clear violation of Vermont's State Code of Ethics. By leveraging his position to influence decisions that would benefit his employer, he has crossed the ethical line on multiple fronts.

Given that communities like Danville are already acting, these are not hypothetical concerns - they have potentially determinative influences.

Thank you for considering this complaint.

Sincerely,

Clayton Cargill
Danville, VT

Act 73 & Local Implications

Rep. Scott Beck

A variety of opinions and accusations have been levied regarding a petition in Danville to close the 9-12 grades at Danville High School.

I am familiar with some of the conversations in Danville that have occurred on this subject. Some I have participated in, and in others I have been an observer, including Tuesday evening in Danville. Danville is in my senate district. If anyone in Danville wants to speak with me or have me attend a meeting, just let me know. It's my job.

A few have claimed to have been lied to or accused others of deceit in regard to this conversation. I do not feel that anyone has lied to me or been deceitful, and I have held myself to that same standard.

This conversation in Danville flows out of Act 73, which became law on July 1. Act 73 is a lengthy act designed to move Vermont toward a more efficient delivery system that increases the options and opportunities for Vermont students, and at a cost that Vermonters can afford. This is accomplished through two primary mechanisms: governance reform and redistricting, and movement toward a foundation funding formula.

I had significant input in the development of Act 73 and was on the Committee of Conference that performed the final negotiation before it reached the Governor's desk. This does not mean I support everything in Act 73. There are parts of Act 73 that I definitely do not agree with, especially mandatory classroom sizes and a statewide calendar. I view these as an unnecessary strike at local control and poor policy.

In the Committee of Conference, I was successful in removing a section that would have restricted local control for all districts that operate public schools. Specifically, Section 8 would have prevented a district choosing to close grades from paying tuition to a public or independent school, and instead would have required them to designate up to three public schools. This section would have been effective on July 1, 2025, but was removed during the final stage of negotiation at my insistence.

In plain language, according to Sec. 8, if Danville grades 9-12 closed (local decision or state imposition) after July 1, 2025, Danville would not have been able to tuition students to an independent school and instead would have to choose three public schools outside of Danville.

The removal of this section was very contentious and has directly fueled the continued animosity about the Committee of Conference and Act 73. It is my opinion that this language or some other mechanism that would achieve the same thing will reenter the conversation and pass in 2026.

No one has to agree with me, but my opinion is informed by twelve years of legislative service, including service on House Education and finance committees in the House and Senate, which control Vermont's funding system. During these twelve years, I have been heavily involved in preserving every district's ability to decide for itself whether it wants to operate or tuition. I understand this subject.

Act 73 has forced school districts and residents to consider/ reconsider education, including whether to operate or provide school choice. When approached by constituents in Danville who desire school choice for 9-12 students, I let them know that my opinion was that the window to make that decision would soon be closing. If Section 8 had passed, the window would already be closed, effective July 1, 2025. I also

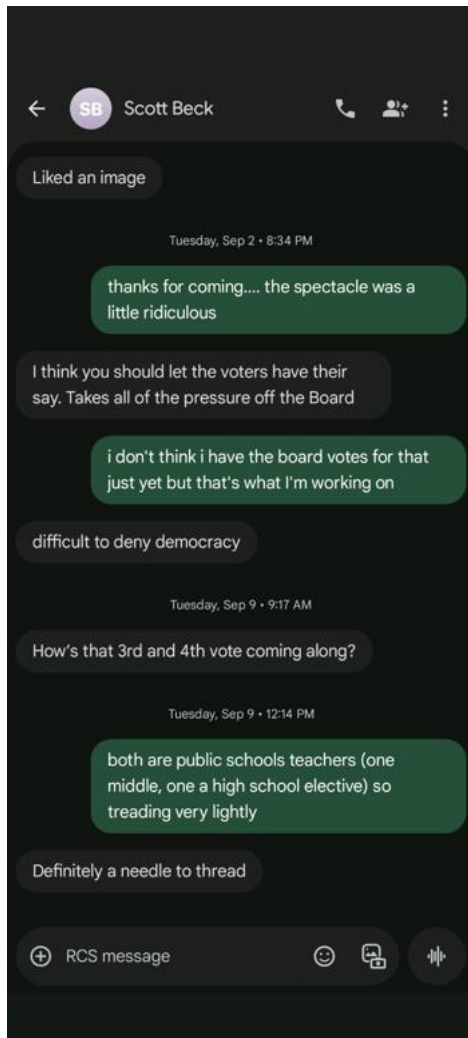
informed them of the statute that governs town petitions in the event that they wanted to petition the Town of Danville on this subject.

I could have withheld my opinion, but that would not have been responsible or consistent with being an elected official. My role as a representative requires me to share facts and opinions with everybody, whether I agree with them or not. Some have questioned my employment at St. Johnsbury Academy as a conflict of interest because the Academy receives public tuition. I do not agree with this criticism because my opinion(s) regarding Sec. 8 would not be different if I were employed elsewhere.

There are lots of thoughts and opinions on this subject; I have already heard from many Danville residents on both sides of this conversation. I look forward to hearing from many others. Please contact me, whether you agree with me or not. sbeck@leg.state.vt.us

Scott Beck is a Vermont State Senator from St. Johnsbury.

Appendix B: text message exchange between myself and Senator Beck



Appendix C: Cabot Survey

Cabot High School Survey September, 2025

Introduction:

The Cabot School Board developed this survey to gather information to guide decisions that will affect Cabot School's future. We hope that you'll take the time to read it carefully and respond to the questions asked. Please complete and return the attached survey by Monday October 20. We'll review them at our regular School Board Meeting on Monday, October 27.

Background Information:

Passed by the Vermont Legislature and signed into law by Governor Scott in June, Act 73 includes reforms to the way schools are organized, governed and funded that will be challenging to many Vermont schools, including ours.

Specifically, the new law sets the dollar amount a given school will spend per pupil. Assuming that the Legislature agrees on a new "map" in its 2026 session that places schools in much larger organized units, those new state-set "foundation grants" would start to go into effect three years from now, during the 2028-29 school year.

This far ahead, it's impossible to know how this "grant from the State" will compare with the budget approved by Cabot voters to operate Cabot School this year, but it's quite possible that the State grant will be lower. If it is, schools like ours will have to decide which programs/staff to reduce or eliminate.

Act 73 also sets "minimum class sizes" for different grade sets, and schools whose average class sizes are below those minimums during the next three years may be closed and/or merged with another school beginning in 2028. Currently Cabot's class sizes are close to the state minimum of 10-12 students in the elementary grades, but this year are well below the minimum of 18 students/class at the high school.

Given these challenges, our board has begun looking at how we might best educate our high-school age students if indeed Cabot's high school is forced to close as early as 2028. This survey is asking for your input as we consider that question.

An additional factor impacting this question is that it's possible that the Legislature could vote to change the current law, which now allows school districts without a high school to tuition their students to any public high school in Vermont as well as a number of other "approved independent schools" like Lyndon Institute and St. Johnsbury Academy. According to Scott Beck, Caledonia County's state senator who also teaches at St. J. Academy, he feels that it's quite likely that the Legislature will remove this "full high school choice" option currently in Act 73 and replace it with language that limits that "high school choice" to just three public high schools designated by the board of the district closing its high school.

In conversations with members of our board, Sen. Beck also brought up the possibility that the Legislature, in making this change next year, might even make the new language retroactive to a certain date. If, for example, the Legislature included language in the revised law that made the "only 3

designated public high schools” change retroactive to Jan 1, 2026, it would mean that a school district like Cabot that wanted to close its high school and offer its students “full high school choice” would have to vote to close its high school before the end of this year.

Obviously it’s impossible to know now whether Senator Beck’s prediction will turn out to be accurate (Several other local legislators were unaware of any concerted effort to change the current law and its “full choice” provision), but we felt it important to include that possibility here.

Survey Questions:

1. I am in support of keeping Cabot High School open through at least the 2027-28 school year.

Yes _____ No _____

2. I am in support of closing Cabot High School this year, so that Cabot’s high school students will be educated elsewhere beginning with the 2026-27 school year.

Yes _____ No _____

3. In order to ensure that Cabot’s students can take advantage of the “full high school choice” option described above, I am in support of holding a town-wide vote this year (prior to Jan 1, 2026) to consider closing Cabot High School at the end of the current 2025-26 school year.

Yes _____ No _____

4. I am in support of holding a town-wide vote on Town Meeting Day (March 3, 2026) to consider closing Cabot High School at the end of the current 2025-26 school year.

Yes _____ No _____

Thanks very much for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.

Sincerely, The Cabot School Board



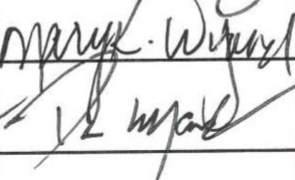
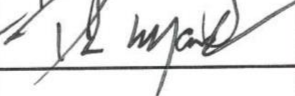
Ellen Cairns Alicia Heber Melissa Pratt Jason Monaco Chris Tormey

Appendix D: Danville Petition

PETITION FOR A VOTE

We the undersigned legal voters of The Town of Danville hereby petition the Danville School Board to warn a special meeting of the legal voters of the Town of Danville to vote on the Article presented below.

Article I: "Shall the voters of the Danville School District authorize and direct the school board to close the existing high school by ceasing to operate grades 9 through 12 at the Danville School as of June 30, 2026, and thereafter provide for the education of students in those grades by paying tuition to a public or approved independent school as authorized by 16 V.S.A. §822?"

	Name	Signature	Street Address
✓ 1	Peter Mantius		631 Bruce Badger Mem. Hwy Danville, VT 05828
✓ 2	Eugene Davis		254 Roy Rd Danville, VT 05828
✓ 3	Mary K. Wynn		2020 Trestle Rd Danville, VT 05828
✓ 4	1/2 Myant		2020 Trestle Rd Danville, VT 05828
5			