

Madam Chair, Mr Chairman and Members of the Education Committee,
My name is John Buonaiuto, I live in Washington, CT
I am in opposition to our State's funding for school construction priority list project #212-0026
Shepaug Valley High School Vo Ag.

I will assume that for all of you, enrollment, at least for all of the new school facilities, is a major concern. Indeed, Shepaug (Region 12) may never obtain the number of out of district students that are necessary to sustain the proposed Vo/Ag project. Declining student enrollment is becoming very symptomatic of this State's smaller school districts. Of the mere six towns that will consist of our out of district catchment area, five are losing student population. We will need an average of 33 students from each sending town, every year. New Milford had to close a school and Newtown is also considering the same. To try and shift students from one declining school district to another will further compound the problems. How is constructing an additional 67,000 sf of new facilities and providing an opulent 24,000 sf indoor equestrian arena at a public high school, because of declining enrollment, justifiable? We would have to import 200 out of district students, some would come from out of county, as far as 30 miles away, in perpetuity. Reluctance on the part of the sending towns to commit more students, busing and long commutes (some could over an hour), conflicting family schedules and separation from their hometown friends would all be limiting factors. The Ag School (especially the animal and plant care) would have to be sustained 24/7 - 365, even if we do not have an adequate student population. This is not a responsibility that the Region 12 and State of Connecticut taxpayers should have to shoulder. A \$40 million (before bond interest) investment by the State and our three towns with no certainty of out of district student enrollment, under the premise of "saving our school"?

In this time of severe State deficits, is this project absolutely crucial to the Connecticut public school system? What would happen if every school system that is experiencing population decline decides to supplement their population by building a Vo/Ag or Magnet school? Can this State afford to finance every school construction project that is not based on imperative need? This questionably viable project does nothing to solve the declining enrollment at our three elementary schools.

Most concerning, is the fact that the Region 12 BoE and Superintendent has not or cannot fulfill condition #2 that was placed on their application to the State BoE on Aug 4, 2015, specifically that "Regional School District 12 obtains agreements from sending towns' local boards of education, signed by the town and the local Board of Education, expressing they are willing to increase the number of students they send to Regional School District 12 above their 3-year average they currently support at Regional School District 14." (subsection (b) of Connecticut General Statute 10-65). Public School Building Projects Section 10-283(a)(2) - requires a review of the enrollment projections for each eligible project. Obviously, the authors of State Statute were concerned with guaranteed enrollment, as you all should be as well.

If you as legislators are truly trying to be fiscally responsible, please, do not approve this projects funding.

Thank you all for your consideration.