

Testimony regarding Bills:

- SB 738
- SB 457
- SB 874

I submit this testimony as chairwoman of the Woodstock Board of Education in opposition to the forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools as outlined in SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874.

Woodstock is an agrarian community in the northeast corner that is the second largest municipality in Connecticut geographically, encompassing 62 square miles. Our population encompasses 8,000 residents, with roughly 1,300 school-aged students who attend the Woodstock Public School District (1 elementary and 1 middle school) and, primarily, The Woodstock Academy, a regional endowed Town Academy. While there are several characteristics that make Woodstock unique, one that I feel compelled to bring to your attention is a local ordinance, Proposition 46, which caps our annual municipal and education expenditures based on revenue and growth of the municipal Grand List. The bills before the Education Committee will put that self-governed ordinance, among many other local initiatives, at risk of collapse.

Regarding education funding, historically, the state has left our community to shoulder more than 50 percent of our local education costs. Last week, we learned that this burden will increase as our ECS funds are slated to decrease over the next five years under the proposed revised ECS calculation. I do know that regionalization, and its tie to ECS funding, will punish responsible towns like Woodstock. In addition, if the goal of these bills is to streamline and reduce education spending, the opposite would be true in our town.

On a yearly basis, the Woodstock community spends approximately \$3,000 below the state cost per pupil spending average; Woodstock ranks 167th in per pupil spending. We are not top heavy with administrators; we spend significantly below average on administrative and support services, which make up 8.2 percent of our budget.

As to shared services, in order for a school district our size to remain strong and continue to attract new families and students, as we do, Board members understand that it is imperative for us to look for efficiencies and to partner with neighboring schools and municipalities. Our superintendent meets regularly with his peers to talk about how to increase collaboration. We annually take advantage of bulk purchasing and reverse auctions through EASTCONN. Last year we transitioned from our small self-insured group and joined the state partnership plan. The schools and town work together to maintain properties and, to use a recent example, clear icy walkways. And, as stated above, we are already a regional school district in that we are one of six towns that have contracts with The Woodstock Academy as a designated high school for our secondary school students.

Despite our frugality, our students routinely perform above state average on their assessments and our local schools remain a source of pride in our community. As Board members, pride ourselves on our ability to meet most of the needs of our students and staff because of our direct knowledge of our public school district; regionalization will remove the critical information needed to make the most cost-effective, educationally-sound decisions during tough budget times.

We have learned from others that forced regionalization does not reduce costs due to such things as combining teacher contracts, providing equitable programming across schools from different communities and facility needs. Specific to our region, it would certainly increase transportation costs, which are a significant portion of Board of Education budgets, and lead to long bus rides for young children; the longest route for a current Woodstock student is roughly 1 hour because of the geographic area. We also know, based on a review of existing regional school districts, that their operational costs exceed our current cost structure.

In closing, regionalization that improves the quality of educational programming and adds to the value of the education experience should be the real motivator for regionalization efforts. Many of these

conversations and initiatives are happening organically between school board members and superintendents in neighboring towns. To force them via state legislation could lead to difficulties not worthy of an academic environment.

Respectfully,

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