

Subject: Opposition to SB 738, SB (454)/457, and SB 874

As a parent of public school students, I am writing to express my vehement opposition to SB 738, SB (454)/457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools including any bill for a study that could lead to forced regionalization.

I have been a resident of Wilton for 10 years. I am a married father of 2 children who attend Wilton School District. We chose to move here 10 years ago from Rye Brook NY specifically for the highly regarded Wilton schools which are blessed to have strong community and "LOCAL" government support and responsible fiscal management. Stripping local control of our schools would irreversibly change the character of our town. Further as I read the Bills, I do not see one mention that regionalization would lead to a higher quality education! Our district attracts the best teachers and administrators who value small districts and personal connections as much as we do. This is true of many smaller school districts. My son's teacher sits on the same bleachers as I do at Wilton little league games cheering for her son and mine who are on the same team. My neighbors are on the Board of Education. My wife is the founder and president of Wilton's first special education PTA (SEPTA). These collaborative relationships and organizations are what makes small Connecticut communities special and high achieving.

I want to share one of the wonderful things Wilton is doing to provide the highest quality education for all of its learners. The current budget includes funding for an alternative high school for grades 7-12 to meet the needs of the student population that need a different teaching model to thrive. The community spoke and the district has put together a plan to respond.

Maintaining the highest quality of the education for our children is a hallmark of Wilton as well as so many of the communities that are threatened by the forced regionalization Bills circulating in Hartford. Our ability to study and implement tailored solutions to provide a high quality education for all our students would not be possible if any of these bills are passed.

For many years, Wilton has worked hard to establish our district as one of the best not just in the state but in the nation. We do not have big industry to fund our educational initiatives in Wilton and the states' fiscal crisis is making more and more of our local business leave or close. The people choose to come to Wilton for the schools and choose to pay the high taxes. Regionalization of any kind, forced or voluntary would threaten the very fabric of what has made Wilton the preferred destination for so many families with school age children. Norwalk (one of the largest school districts), Darien and many other communities have also lashed out against this threat to usurp "local" control over educational programs and fiscal decisions.

In my perspective, this is coercion by government to gain funding in a twisted and contorted process that moves money around to trick the citizens into believing that we will save on our property taxes.

CT has huge fiscal problems. A declining population due to lack of interest in living in a state with high taxes, a stagnant economy and limited job opportunities. A desperate attempt to balance a budget that already relies on the 80% of taxes collected from Fairfield County. A government that drives large corporations, like GE, out because CT is no longer perceived as business friendly and is expected to worsen given no clear plan for fiscal improvement executed under the Malloy administration. Our Wilton economy shows its weakness every time another store or restaurant closes along Route 7 but our residents continue to support investment in our schools.

Think again on how to fix the state. The answer is not to destroy the community gems that are able to independently rise above the state problems, flourish as great communities to raise a family, and invest in and produce nationally ranked schools with little or no state funding support.

I believe strongly in the American principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This is a freedom that I chose when moving to Wilton for my life, my liberty to send my children to Wilton schools, and my pursuit of happiness in a small town like Wilton. I am deeply disturbed that as a governing body, you are willing to strip those rights from my family and the other citizens of the State of Connecticut.

I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB (454)/457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools including any bill for a study that could lead to forced regionalization.

Key studies to support the opposition of these bills:

-The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools, and leveling up salaries, and sorting through legal obligations will offset any savings

-A 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found the savings from school consolidation are “vastly overestimated.”

-Larger school districts end up hiring more administrators, not fewer.

- UConn found in 2010 that there is no link between efficiency and academic performance.

-Any consideration of mandatory consolidation of schools must start with education quality and there is no proof that larger schools are better than smaller ones.

-Student and parent engagement declines when schools are expanded.

-School consolidation can mean longer bus rides for students which leads to lower achievement scores, more absenteeism, and health consequences for students.

Best regards,

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