

## Testimony

To: Education Committee

Date: February 26, 2019

Re: Bill 457 and Bill 738

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in regard to the bills pending to consider forced regionalization of schools. I have been a member of my local board of education in Litchfield for the past 11 years. I am currently the Chair of the Litchfield Board of Education. I have previously served as Vice Chair, and the Chair of both the curriculum and policy committees. I do not speak for my board but thought that it would be appropriate for you to know the context from which this testimony comes.

Regional School District #6 comprises three towns surrounding Litchfield with a high school located in Litchfield. We have been working cooperatively with Region #6 for decades and have expanded that during my tenure as Board Chair. We engage in cooperative buying on things such as oil, have cooperated with them and other districts to have a shared food service, and are in discussions to further expand areas of mutual benefit such as the purchase of insurance. Additionally, at the high school level, we do share classes in the blocks where the transportation of students between districts is possible within those schedules as well as extra curricular activities such as school plays. That being said, there are substantial issues to address in forcing regionalization. The regional school owns their buildings whereas the town owns ours. In a forced regionalization, how much do the citizens have to pay in order to buy into an existing regional school? Can the town afford that cost or will the State subsidize this venture? Our town has a population which exceeds the other districts, what is the weight of votes when it comes to making educational decisions? In addition the logistics of combining regions, which are not insurmountable but can be in a fiscal sense, there are educational issues. Would regionalizing force the combination or eradication of small schools at the elementary level? How long is it appropriate for a young child to be confined on a school bus each day? All discussions which I have heard are under consideration have been driven by the number of students in a district rather than the needs of the children. In just Litchfield, which is 57 square miles, students already spend an hour on the bus in each direction to get to and from school. In rural districts those distances and time to travel can expand significantly especially in bad weather. This can be a detriment to the students. Moreover, at the high school level, we know that the early rising times is detrimental to student learning. As it is now, students rise and wait in the dark in single digit temperatures to catch a bus at 6:30 a.m. to arrive at school for 7:20 start time. Expand the travel time to school and students are up even earlier. That is unacceptable.

Small districts currently face issues of declining enrollment and decreasing revenue. We are finding ways to cooperate with other districts in order to enrich the educational opportunities for our children and to decrease the burden on the tax payers. We are already doing this because it is the right thing to do for those we represent. A mandate would fail to take into consideration the special needs of rural communities and the only ones who would be harmed in the process would be the children who are least able to ensure that their needs are represented. And, while I am sure that there are reasons

to provide incentives for additional collaboration, cooperation and regionalization where appropriate, a one size fits all approach, which is likely driven by the urban communities would be a poor fit for our communities in the furthest reaches of the State.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,  
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