

Joshua S. Cole, Esq.  
Wilton, CT

February 28, 2019

*VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL*

Education Committee- *EDTestimony@cga.ct.gov*

Re: Education/School Regionalization Proposals  
File To: SB454; SB457; SB738; SB874; and HB7150

Dear Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Education Committee:

I write to you to express my vehement opposition to the above-referenced Bills as a father of school-aged children, a property owner and resident of the state, a voter, and a member of the Town of Wilton Board of Selectmen.

Each and every municipality in Connecticut takes pride in its school system. Whether the focus of that pride is a school's ranking in national or local excellence polls, the success of its athletic programs, the excellence of its arts and music programs, or an alumni who brings pride or prestige to his or her community or hope to students who are still making their way, our schools help shape our community identity. Any proposal to study, mandate, or force through the withholding of State aid, the regionalization, consolidation, or any other action that would remove, lessen, or otherwise restrict or diminish the exclusive control of our schools by local town and city boards and elected local officials should be rejected.

Our residents, parents, and elected community leaders know what is best for our children and our schools. We know how to recruit and train our teachers. We know how to set our budgets to provide the equipment, services, resources, and amenities that our schools need. Previous studies regarding school consolidation regionalization show little to no cost savings.

Further studies will have a chilling effect on residency, business creation, and retention of our residents. Moreover, in light of the State having already reduced the municipal aid and ECS funding given to some towns, including Wilton, there is even less of a reason for the State to direct how we manage our schools.

Additionally, the State made a commitment to fund teacher pensions, and local municipalities and teachers reasonably relied upon that commitment. Attempts to transfer this responsibility to the local municipalities because of the State's failure to timely fund its obligations is unconscionable, especially when considering that elected representatives for local municipalities are not permitted to participate in related negotiations. This additional tax burden to towns where State education funding was cut or eliminated is especially egregious.

The Town of Wilton operates under a Town Meeting form of government. This form of government has served Wilton, and many other towns in New England, well since the colonial era. At the annual Town Meeting, our school and town budgets are reviewed, debated, and voted upon by the Town's citizens. The Town Meeting, with its focus on local governance and community control, represents "democracy at its finest."<sup>1</sup>

I ask that you strongly oppose SB454, SB457, SB738, SB874, and HB7150 and any other legislation that opens the door to centralization or regionalization of our schools, any study regarding these concepts, or a cram-down of State teacher pension obligations to our town.

Sincerely,

*Joshua S. Cole*

Joshua S. Cole, Esq.

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<sup>1</sup> See Good Morning Wilton, [Orderly, Packed Town Meeting Sends Proposed Budget Unchanged to Voters](https://goodmorningwilton.com/orderly-packed-town-meeting-sends-proposed-budget-unchanged-to-voters/), May 2, 2018, available at: <https://goodmorningwilton.com/orderly-packed-town-meeting-sends-proposed-budget-unchanged-to-voters/>, last accessed February 27, 2019.

cc:

Governor Ned Lamont- *Through Website*

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz- *LtGovernor.Bysiewicz@ct.gov*

Speaker Joe Aresimowicz- *Joe.Aresimowicz@cga.ct.gov*

Pres. *Pro Tempore* Martin Looney- *Looney@senatedems.ct.gov*

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