

Senate Bill No. 457 and 738

I am writing regarding my concerns surrounding recent bills designed to explore regionalization of school districts. While I commend our state legislature for seeking creative solutions to Connecticut's challenges, I feel strongly that pursuing this strategy is counter-productive on several levels. First, it removes the necessary local communication, transparency, accountability and autonomy away from educators that is critical towards building and maintaining a high functioning school district. Second, the potential administrative savings may be overwhelmed by expensive regional and state-level mandated transportation and infrastructure costs. Third, it removes the ability for Connecticut residents, as well as prospective Connecticut residents, to invest in communities and school districts that meet their objectives, be it the choice to live in smaller communities with more intimate surroundings, or the choice to live in larger, more diverse urban locations.

On a personal level, I chose to move back to Connecticut in 2014 with my wife, daughter and now son, after having spent four years in Texas. During the time I was gone, the income state income tax rate increased materially, along with property taxes in many districts. As a business owner, the choice to move from a low tax, lower cost of living state like Texas back to a high tax, high cost of living state like Connecticut was not one taken lightly from a financial perspective. One of the key factors that ultimately supported our decision to relocate back to Connecticut was the strength of the individual public-school offerings available in many of the towns we evaluated. Like many small towns in CT, New Canaan invests heavily in its school system, and families move here because they value a community where residents are committed to helping our educators and administrators achieve excellence on a local level through consistent participation. I am extremely concerned that compromising this local dynamic will result in decreased participation as more families choose alternative options, and the relative value of towns like New Canaan become less attractive to parents who are part of an increasingly mobile workforce.

While solving our financial problems in Connecticut will take time, we are not going to be successful unless we can attract and maintain talent and wealth. Many of the policies and choices that have been made over the past several decades have resulted in stagnant and declining real estate values and increasing property taxes. Please do not accelerate this decline through the pursuit of policies that erode the value of one of our greatest assets.

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