

Re: OPPOSITION to Bills (SB-874), (SB-738) & (SB-457)

As Wilton residents of 17 years, WE VEHEMENTLY OPPOSE PROPOSED BILLS (Lamont: SB-874), (Looney: SB-738) and (Duff: SB-457). We fell in love with Wilton's small town feel, caring community and were and still are quite impressed with its award winning school district; so much so we decided to make Wilton our home and raise our 2 children here. We agree whole-heartedly with Wilton School District Superintendent Kevin Smith:

"While there are many important reasons to oppose the concept of forced regionalization, including potential degradation of education quality, and concerns about property values, there is no empirical evidence to validate that such a move actually leads to cost savings. In fact, research by the National Education Policy Center concluded that benefits from school district consolidation are "vastly overestimated." Further, an article in Education Finance and Policy suggested that district consolidation may actually create negative impacts such as higher transportation costs, a "leveling up" of salaries, and more negative attitudes among staff members and parents. The same study suggests that financial benefits may be found only when consolidation of very small districts (fewer than 300 to 1000 students) occurs.

Of significant concern as well is the Governor's proposal to require municipalities to fund a portion of teacher pension costs. I am vehemently opposed to this concept because, at its heart, it is a dereliction of state responsibility. For decades our state leaders failed to adequately fund the plan they created. Local municipalities had no influence over the design or the decision to fund (or not fund) the plan. Despite the fact that this crisis has been growing for years, our leaders in Hartford have turned a blind eye. Now, standing at a fiscal cliff, the solution appears to be to shift the burden to local municipalities including Wilton, that have responsibly managed their finances.

And to add insult to injury, the Governor's plan also calls for a surcharge for towns like Wilton that pay teacher salaries that exceed the state median. The plan does not account for higher costs of living in areas such as Fairfield County, or the impact of binding arbitration, two factors beyond local control that strongly influence salary agreements. To make matters even more dire, the legislature is also contemplating a bill (SB 431) that proposes to divert motor vehicle tax revenue from municipalities to the state government.

The cumulative effect of these proposals, if enacted, would be millions of dollars in additional obligations for Wilton residents. This would likely result in increased property taxes for a diminished, regionalized school system. We simply cannot let that happen."

Richard and Claire Dineen  
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