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Testimony from Madeline Farrell

In Support of Senate Bill 457 An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts.

Chairman McCrory, Sanchez; Vice Chairs; Ranking Members; and the Distinguished Members of the Education Committee.

I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 457 An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts.

This proposal is necessary to improve the Connecticut education system , which has been cited twice for failing education requirements. I am from Westbrook, CT and graduated from my public high school with a class of about 76. Currently, I am a senior at the University of Connecticut Storrs campus studying Genetics and Psychological Development. Going from a high school of about three hundred students to a university of nearly twenty thousand was radical and I loved it. I tell people that the greatest thing about UConn are the opportunities. With more than 600 clubs and organizations, and hundreds of undergraduate courses, UConn allows students to explore the diversity of the world.

My hometown is very small with a population of about 7,000. Small schools like mine don't have enough students to offer the opportunities possible in towns 15 minutes away that have high school enrollments of over 1,100. Our academic programs don't produce students who regularly enroll in Ivy League universities. Our athletic programs rarely make conference or state championships. They can only offer basic courses and basic sport teams since they don't have the numbers to fill more. In highschool, I played soccer, basketball and ran track and field. A large majority of students played at least one sport, because without this involvement there wouldn't be any teams. Many parents praised Westbrook for the inclusive athletic program, but it only catered to a limited number of teams. There weren't many options so students had to go to private teams often and through them may have competed as a team of one for the school. This privilege isn't afforded to all students who, if they join one of the school's limited teams, lose year after year. Losing ten nothing to regional schools double your size shows how small schools cannot compete effectively to the detriment of the school and students. With more students there can be more teams so all students can find out where they succeed and have a chance against their opponents. I wish I had more options since I, at five feet, did not thrive in basketball, and I didn't have the financial capability to explore beyond what my public school offered.

As years pass, our school enrollment continues to decline, and with this, the already few benefits of a very small school decrease and the limitations increase. My town's current population cannot sustain its school system. As enrollment declines, teachers must be let go because the

kindergarten classes have decreased to about thirty students. I have three cousins who live in my town, one is a sophomore in high school, one is an eighth grader and one is a second grader. They aren't offered the same opportunities I was offered. My school offers limited flexibility for students regarding class options and extracurriculars when compared to my cousins in Westport, which is a very large school district with about 5500 students. Compared to Westbrook's 900 total students, the difference in opportunities is logical but the difference in quality of education and experience can be mitigated by consolidating small school districts like Westbrook. Small schools like this are a financial burden to the town and halt student success. Students shouldn't have to wait until university for a diverse learning experience and opportunities. It leaves them unprepared for the real world and ignorant of their own potential.

Educating our youth and growing the future generation are our most important duties as a society. With larger schools, students could have better teachers, a more diverse student body and more course offerings. Students who are struggling in their classes because they learn differently than other students and would be supported with a larger student body where students with similar learning patterns can receive the targeted teaching critical for their individual success. Visual, tactical, auditory and other types of learners can be taught by specialized teachers trained for different education types. People often cite that regionalization would bring large classes, but overhead costs would be reduced if buildings were consolidated and that money could go to employing more teachers so there can be small class sizes. I strongly believe regionalizing schools will bring diverse classes, better teachers and more opportunities for debate and discussion.

If we joined school districts with the town next door, where we already share high school and town sports programs with like football and cross country, we wouldn't even have 800 students in the high school. We would barely reach the 2,000 students in the district outlined in this proposal. This would still be a small school. Many of the people who are angry about this bill come from towns with a high school of more than 1,300 students and a district of more than 4,100. This is well above the population of any of the schools in my area that need to regionalize. This bill needs to target school districts like mine that are too small for the town to support financially. For towns with an aging population, residents on a fixed income and lower income status families, the financial burden on the town and its taxpayers would be reduced through consolidation of school districts. Regionalization would save individuals money, produce a higher quality school system and reduce government involvement in the long run. We need incentives to regionalize for certain districts to improve student experiences, lower overhead costs and raise student success.

Regionalization has been successful in Connecticut despite what some would say otherwise. These schools are near mine and in the same conference. In my experience, they were consistently successful in sports, winning regional and state championships, in academics, with

numerous students testing in the highest percentile and enrolling in Ivy League universities, and in experiences, with well-rounded extracurricular activities and experiential learning. According to the Supreme Court, teachers, and students, Connecticut's education system is failing its students and must improve. I implore the committee to consider regionalization for schools like mine as you discuss ways to improve our education system.