

February 12, 2019

Esteemed Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my thoughts regarding SB 457, related to school redistricting. I speak as a former public-school student, current public-school teacher and a homeowner in a relatively affluent town.

Connecticut towns and the state have been facing financial concerns for years now, and it does not seem the situation will be resolved soon. Regionalization could provide ways for schools to save costs, specially at the central-office level. Superintendents, coordinators and other administrators are paid significantly more than classroom teachers, have great benefits, and have amazing pensions. Administrative costs for small districts are a disproportionately large budgetary strain. By combining central offices in smaller towns, it is likely there would be more funds available for more teachers, reducing overall class sizes and/or increasing the courses available to students.

There is significant benefit in having a larger pool of students, which would be the case with more regionalization within our state. Larger schools have significantly more opportunities than I was ever presented with in my small regional high school. In addition to increased course options and extracurricular opportunities, a larger student body may also allow districts to get better deals on learning materials, such as books and equipment. Additionally, those combined schools would more likely be able to have more specialists, such as psychologists and speech therapists, as there would be a great need for their population. Some districts may be able to have more targeted special education programs, gifted and talented programs, and collaborate more with colleges and businesses.

Perhaps the most significant reason why Connecticut needs to change its organization and funding of public schools is social justice. As long as town-based property taxes are the main source of public-school funding, students across our state will never have access to equal educational opportunity. I am very fortunate to have been raised in a single-family home in a good town by my biological parents, both of whom had college degrees. I had books to read and learned fractions through cooking and was able to attend museums, all at a very young age. My parents worked hard their entire lives to get those privileges for me and my siblings. Although I believe students get out of education what they put in, my education was far superior to that of my students because of the opportunities my parents provided. As my peers had similar experiences, my classes could go much

faster and deeper into content that those without literacy skills in elementary school could ever have. Unless all students have a chance to access that level of education, we will never close Connecticut's large achievement gap.

I am familiar with the history of de-facto segregation within Connecticut's public schools. I have benefited immensely from it, and I understand entirely why people in my position will fight to keep their small towns isolated. However, I cannot morally support the sins of my forefathers that rig the system against my current students, who have done nothing to deserve anything but the best of what our state has to offer. All students need to have a quality education.

Thus, I like the idea of SB 457, which gives the districts more freedom to create new districts in ways that will minimize additional funding concerns, such as increased busing costs in geographically larger areas. This could work well especially for the more rural areas. By only requiring districts smaller than 2000 students to combine, it also keeps the school community at a much more reasonable number. However, lines 5-8 concern me: "...to require any such school district that is not joining a regional school district to submit in writing to the Department of Education the reasons why such school district is not joining a regional school district." I think this clause is too easily bypassed, and the de-facto segregation within our school systems will continue. I believe consolidation should be incentivized. I do not claim to know enough about the local politics to know what an effective incentive would be, but it would have to be lucrative enough to overcome the socioeconomic and racial prejudices that permeate our current educational system. Relatedly, there should be a punitive measure for districts that do not consolidate.

I firmly believe the state should begin legislating major changes to Connecticut's educational system. However, I do also believe in self-governance, and allowing voters to make decisions that will best support their community, while also bringing the entire state towards a more equitable and financially responsible future. As written, I do not believe SB 457 is the way to do that.

Thank you for your consideration.

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