

SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874

Testimony of Lisa Henriques Brower, resident of Wilton, Connecticut
March 1, 2019

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874. My name is Lisa Brower and I am a Wilton resident **AGAINST** the proposed regionalization of our school and in particular SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874.

Approximately, six years ago, my family moved from the Washington, DC area to the Greater New York Area. My husband took a job in New York City and I was offered a position in Stamford, CT. At the time, we looked for homes in both Fairfield County and Westchester County, but ultimately decided to purchase a home in Wilton because of the excellent schools and the sense of community - despite the long commute my husband would incur because we loved the schools and we wanted our young children to grow up in this community. The schools were the factor that set Wilton apart from the other towns in Connecticut and New York. The proposed regionalization will destroy that.

The regionalization has grave consequences for Wilton and the state. First, there is no proof that the regionalization will provide better quality schools – in fact, it is likely it will destroy them.

Second, there is no proof that regionalization will provide a 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.

Third, the regionalization of the schools will adversely affect property values. The home prices are higher in towns like Wilton, Darien, and New Canaan due in large part to the quality of the schools.

Last, I am opposed to the proposal to require municipalities to fund a portion of teacher pension costs. Poor fiscal planning for teacher pensions is the state’s responsibility. This is the State's mismanagement. Not Wilton's. Our town had no influence over the design or the decision to fund (or not fund) the plan. By imposing these costs on municipalities, the state is endangering the fiscal welfare of the towns, which will affect home values.

In sum, I am against these proposals. They will not improve the fiscal status of our state. There is no evidence that regionalization will lead to cost savings or better quality education. Companies – like GE Capital and UBS, among others have left the state in the six years my family has lived here. No new major companies are coming to Connecticut, which limits the jobs opportunities. In addition, taxes are increasing. Families will not want to move to Connecticut if there are mediocre schools, no high quality job opportunities, high taxes, and long

commutes to New York City. Families, like mine, will settle in Westchester County where the commute to New York City is shorter, the taxes are more palatable, and the public schools are top notch. The schools are the last good thing in this state - and frankly the only thing left that will attract new families to Connecticut.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Sincerely,

Lisa Henriques Brower

Wilton Connecticut