

TO Senator Douglas McCrory and Representative Robert Sanchez, Education Committee Chairs and Committee Members:

I write in strong opposition to bills SB 457, SB 738, and the Governor's bill 874.

As a member of the Wilton Board of Finance and as the former Wilton Democratic Town Chair, I find these bills to be totally off base from everything we are trying to do to bring the best of education to our students in the most efficient and cost-effective way and to make Wilton an attractive community for people to move to and stay. To consider forced regionalization according to probate districts is ridiculous.

These bills have created at first shock, then anger, then defiance, and then outrage among our residents. Our schools are the reason that 81% of people move to Wilton, we have proven in a recent survey conducted by the Board of Finance. If our schools are threatened, people interested in moving here will go elsewhere. Our realtors are seeing prospects turn away. Already many of my peers have stated that they fear their property values would fall greatly. Property values have not risen according to our most recent revaluation. Others would move away before they would give up local control of the schools.

These bills state the goal of regionalization is cost saving, efficiency, and cooperation between school districts. We do all this now in Wilton. The finance departments for the Town and the School have been merged under one director. The Town facilities manager is also the facilities manager for the schools, as well as director of the DPW. We share a high school girls hockey team with Norwalk. Our school superintendent has planned an alternative high school that our Board of Finance reviewed and the Board of Education has just approved that will save Wilton upwards of \$400,000 the first year by keeping certain SPED students here rather than placing them in special and distant schools for their needs. We would like to see more opportunities for voluntary cooperation along the lines of the 10-158A statute.

As a Board of Finance member on the Business Operations Committee of the Board of Education, I work closely with the BOE members and the superintendent to ensure that there is no waste in our school budget and that we make the most effective use of funds. Our BOF has this year put together and produced with the schools a series of metrics to measure the effectiveness of our school system. As a member of the Long-Range Planning Committee of the Schools, I know the lengths our schools and residents go to make our schools efficient and effective.

We in Wilton are very proud of our schools, their reputation among the best in the State, and their many graduates who go on to successful lives and careers. My three children are graduates of Wilton schools.

These bills have created the strongest issue and reaction that I have ever seen in my 36 years in Wilton. Friday, March 1, you will have hundreds of Wiltonians at your hearing to tell you that these bills are not the way forward.

Please kill these bills now.

Sincerely yours,

John J. Kalamarides, Jr.

