

Dear 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 874. Please note this testimony is in addition to testimony I previously submitted on SB 457 and 738. I have included the previously submitted testimony below for reference.

In regards to SB 874, I am 100% against forced regionalization. My children currently attend schools in Wolcott, which is a very well run district. As Dr. Gaspar noted in his testimony, Wolcott has one of the highest ROI in the state when it comes to education. Our schools are well run by teachers, principals and staff that are passionate about education. Our Board of Education takes extraordinary measures to ensure the needs of our children are met while also being fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars. In short, there is no need for Wolcott to regionalize unless the taxpayers in the town decide to do so.

To force Wolcott to regionalize with Waterbury, an urban district with very different goals and needs than Wolcott, simply does not make sense. The communities are vastly different in terms of needs and I see this move as detrimental students across both communities.

While I realize the State of Connecticut is up against many challenges, forced school regionalization is not the answer. Towns and cities should be free to collaborate with other districts if they choose to do so. For the State of Connecticut to force regionalization on small towns would be bring no value to the Wolcott school district.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

As noted, below is my prior testimony submitted on February-27-2019 related to SB 457 and 738 for reference:

Dear Legislators for the State of Connecticut,

I am writing to you today to strongly oppose Bill 457 and Bill 738. As a lifelong resident of Connecticut who has had ample opportunity to move elsewhere, I can tell you I love this state. I have turned down opportunities to live in several areas across the world because I want to raise my children in Connecticut. I believe in the state and I see a path forward that will get Connecticut back on track in becoming a "state of choice" for people.

Having said that, I am strongly against these bills. I have chosen to live in a small town that is fiscally responsible. I have not chosen a large city to raise my family for many reasons, including the education system. I have had the experience of having one child attend a magnet school in Waterbury and one in a public school in Wolcott. I have family and friends that teach in Waterbury, Hartford, South Windsor, Enfield, Farmington, Westport, and Darien. I talk to them all and I trust my own experiences when making choices for my children. My decision for my family was to have both children in a public school, in a small town, that aligns with educational values that I feel are best for my family. To force families who have made this choice to partner with large, urban school

districts is not only unfair to those of us that have chosen this path but also, in my opinion, a blatant misuse of taxpayer money coming from small districts.

While I understand the rationale behind these bills and I do believe economies of scale can be found in regionalization, it should be up to the towns to decide who they want to partner with, not the state. I would have far less concern with these bills if regionalization for Wolcott were a partnership with other small towns (e.g. Prospect, Cheshire). In fact, I would actually SUPPORT regionalization with these towns. I could even get on board with collaborating with Southington, which, while a huge school system with its own challenges, offers some benefits to the residents of Wolcott (e.g. strong Agriculture program, a multitude of sports teams, etc.). If there is such a need to regionalize, why is it not an option to have large districts partner and allow small towns to partner together? If pairing Wolcott/Waterbury together is an option, why is it not also an option to pair Wolcott/Cheshire/Prospect and allow Waterbury to collaborate with another city such as Bristol, Middletown, or Meriden?

To force regionalization on small towns is simply unethical and a gross misuse of power. As state leaders, I urge you to think very carefully about the long term impact of this decision. It not only affects our children but the entire state. I can definitely say if this is forced upon my family my children would quickly be in a private school and the moment they were done my husband and I would be out of state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lisa Lawson
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