

February 26, 2019

My Opposition to SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874

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 Anna Marley and I strongly oppose forced school regionalization as introduced in SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874. I moved to Wilton, Connecticut, last year with my husband and our two 5-year old boys. They started school in the Wilton School district this past year and we couldn't have been happier with our decision to move to this town until we learned, in January, of the now SB 457 and SB 738 bills that were introduced. Our hearts literally sank when we heard of these bills as regionalization of the Wilton School district would not only impact the quality of education that our children currently receive, but it would greatly harm the character and identify of our town. Governor Lamont's recent bill SB 874 has caused even more concern.

This is actually the second time I have moved to Wilton. My parents moved to Wilton with my two brothers and me in 1986 when I was 7-years old. I started in the Wilton school district in the second grade and I graduated in 1997 from Wilton High School. My parents also made sacrifices to live in our town, including a long work commute for my father and high taxes. Just as the benefits of a small community, where the schools are a focal point of pride and identity, were clear to my parents in the 1980s, they are even more clear now in 2019. This is evident by the sheer number of fellow classmates I went to school with in Wilton who also chose to come back home to Wilton to raise their families. On just my street, I have a fellow classmate and there are countless more across town. We didn't come back for the high taxes or for a longer commute to work, we came back for the schools. Schools which have been lovingly run in local partnership between parents and school administrators for decades.

Since learning of these bills, I have conducted my own research and my initial ill-feelings towards this concept has been verified. There has been no apparent consideration for the impact that these bills would have on the quality of education across the state, which should be the primary driver for all the students of Connecticut. It is hard to argue that forcing schools (Wilton or any other school) into larger districts will have a positive outcome for any of the students involved (including those in both larger and smaller districts). One of the most telling points I have read was highlighted in a paper entitled *Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What Research Says and What it Means*, by the National Education Policy Center, in 2011:

"Contemporary research does not support claims about the widespread benefits of consolidation. The assumptions behind such claims are most often dangerous oversimplifications. For example, policymakers may believe "We'll save money if we reduce the number of superintendents by consolidating districts;" however, larger districts need--and usually hire--more mid-level administrators. Research also suggests that impoverished regions in particular often benefit from smaller schools and districts, and they can suffer irreversible

damage if consolidation occurs. For these reasons, decisions to deconsolidate or consolidate districts are best made on a case-by-case basis. While state-level consolidation proposals may serve a public relations purpose in times of crisis, they are unlikely to be a reliable way to obtain substantive fiscal or educational improvement.”

The impact of these bills is already being felt and I have spoken to many people in recent weeks who have said they are much less likely to consider moving to Connecticut (including my brother who lives across the border in New York) given that the possibility of forced school regionalization is alive. Even worse, I have spoken to others who are considering moving out of Connecticut should the legislation pass. This is the last thing the state needs. Frankly, my husband and I have also started to consider what we would do in the event that these bills are not withdrawn. We don't want to consider moving from a place I have called home for over 3 decades if any of these bills become a reality. Connecticut cannot afford to lose even more tax payers. If you take away one of the biggest draws, locally-run schools, it's not hard to imagine this will happen.

Please think long and hard before you force an agenda down to our town and other towns that will not have the intended consequence you seek. Please oppose SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874, and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you for your time and for hearing my testimony. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have at any point.

Sincerely a Concerned Mother and Resident of Wilton,

Anna Marley