

Robin and John Nelson
51 Arrowhead Way
Darien, CT 06820

February 27, 2019

Dear Members of the Connecticut State Education Committee:

My name is Robin Nelson, and I live at 51 Arrowhead Way in Darien. My husband, John Nelson, and I moved to Darien, CT from Manhattan, NY in 2010 – largely for the excellent reputation of the Darien schools. We have three children: a 4th grader at Tokeneke Elementary School, a 6th grader at Middlesex Middle School, and a 7th grader at Greens Farms Academy.

We wanted to write to you to express our strong opposition to the proposed forced regionalization of Connecticut schools, as outlined in SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874. We are opposed to school regionalization for the following reasons:

- 1) First, and most importantly, we are concerned that these proposals to regionalize Connecticut schools have not considered the potentially negative impact on the quality of students' educations as a result of the proposed regionalization. The most important aspect of providing education to our children is whether we achieve improved educational outcomes in the long-run. While we understand the state's desire to achieve cost efficiencies, we are concerned that the sole focus on achieving cost efficiencies through regionalization will negatively impact the overall quality of our students' education. We prefer the current locally run and politically representative structures in our municipalities, where the elected members of the Boards of Education are held accountable by the fact that they are elected positions, voted on by the town's residents. Locally run schools are better able to cater to the needs and priorities of the local constituent student population, and as a result, achieve improved educational outcomes and higher quality education.
- 2) The bills proposing forced regionalization of Connecticut schools seem to be premised on finding cost-savings as a result of school regionalization. However, there have been no data or evidence given in any of the proposals as to how or whether these costs savings could be accomplished. On the contrary, the proposed bill by Governor Lamont (SB 874) contains language regarding future state grants that would be needed to fund new buildings to accommodate the new proposed "regional education centers." We question how this type of proposal will end up saving money. It appears that the long-term costs will potentially exceed those of the current locally run and efficient school systems, while reducing the overall quality of education.
- 3) The town of Darien should not be forced to regionalize its schools in order to make up for a lack of sound school budgeting or fiscal management on the part of other municipalities in the state of Connecticut. As a former Co-Chair of the Council of

Darien School Parents and Budget Representative for Tokeneke Elementary School, I have first-hand experience working closely with the Darien Schools Superintendent, Darien Board of Education, and PTO leadership of all of the Darien schools to ensure that Darien students are afforded the best possible education to fit the needs of the local student community, while being cognizant of minimizing the taxpayer burden. Darien has consistently done this within realistic budget constraints that are the result of a rigorous and thoughtful budget process. Darien has managed its school budgets extremely responsibly, and as a result, has built a reputation for excellent schools and prudent fiscal management.

- 4) Additionally, it does not appear that legislators made any attempt to engage or solicit feedback from local school administrators or Boards of Education prior to writing these legislative proposals. Before any school regionalization proposals are considered, formalized, or passed as law, we strongly believe that it is critical for legislators to solicit and take into consideration the knowledgeable and important input of local Boards of Education, school superintendents, PTO's, and parents/students to ensure that any proposals result in outcomes that meet the needs of the local municipalities and their students. Without this input, we are concerned that the regionalized schools would result in a lower quality education that does not meet the specific needs or priorities of the local communities or their student populations.
- 5) Finally, in the event that school regionalization were to occur, we believe that the longer-term outcomes would be that fewer people would choose to move to Connecticut and existing residents may choose to leave, both of which would reduce the tax base revenue and result in diminished municipal and state budgets. The end result would be to damage the high quality of education currently delivered in Connecticut schools, which is one of the primary reasons that people currently choose to move to Connecticut in the first place.

We respectfully urge you to oppose the current school regionalization proposals (SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874), in order to allow smaller municipalities like Darien to continue to maintain and operate their school systems locally. We believe strongly that this localized system more effectively meets the needs of the local student population and the town's taxpayer constituents than a generic regionalized school system, which would dilute the overall quality of education and effectively remove the democratic checks and balances that currently exist in our locally managed municipality.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin and John Nelson

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