

I am writing to express my opposition to Senator Looney, Senator Duff and Governor Lamont's proposed bills PSB 738, PSB 457 and PSB 874 which would force regionalization of many of Connecticut's public schools. Having attended elementary and middle school in a regionalized district in Missouri, I experienced, firsthand, the negative effects of county run school systems: low student achievement, disengaged teachers and an administration that ignored, or perhaps didn't know how to handle, the vast differences in their student population. I then went to high school at Northwest Regional #7 in Connecticut. While Regional #7 is an example of a regionalized system that works fairly well, it should be noted that the 4 towns that comprise that district MAKE SENSE due to their small sizes and similar challenges/assets.

As a parent of public school students in Wilton, Connecticut, it is very concerning to think that, as per Senator Looney's bill, there would be a mandate for districts to be arranged per probate lines. My oldest son went to kindergarten in Norwalk, which would be blended with Wilton according to this plan. I wanted to believe that if we lived in the right "zone" or got him into one of the Magnet or Charter programs that he would get a wonderful education. He "won" a place at Columbus Magnet School and, while they are doing tremendous things at that school, I witnessed public school board meetings where parents were cursing and yelling at each other, as well as administrators, due to frustration and saw firsthand the challenges of overcrowding and poor infrastructure in the Norwalk system. We moved to Wilton and now have witnessed the amazing benefits of their public schools. My children are educated in a nurturing environment where teacher engagement is high, individualized student learning is understood and acknowledged and high achievement is praised. Forward thinking school districts like Wilton should be emulated, not forced to go down some rabbit hole that hasn't been properly researched or allowed for community input.

I believe it is naïve to think that the main difference between school districts like Wilton and Norwalk is purely monetary and can be fixed through economies of scale. Though I understand how it may appear attractive, this bill attacks our most precious asset as a community - the quality of our schools. If approved, this bill would certainly compound the mass exodus of residents and companies leaving the state. Further, I am certain that increased transportation costs, the very predictable "leveling up" of teacher salaries that would be sought by the teachers' unions and the untold costs of combining administrative infrastructures/systems of vastly different districts would negate any savings offered via economies of scale. The only outcome I can see would be eliminating local control and harming school quality. While I want all Connecticut school children to have the best education possible, we cannot continue to chip away at the high performing districts, as has been done for the last several years with extreme state funding cuts, for the sake of the lower performing ones.

For these reasons, I implore you for your support in opposing SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874 or any other efforts to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

Sincerely,

Lora Pham

Wilton, CT