

February 28, 2019

Opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874

My family and I moved to Wilton, Connecticut in 2012 for one reason, and one reason only: the exceptional school system.

Ours is a common story, given the highly regarded educational system for which Wilton is known. We moved here when our children were in 2nd and 5th grade; they are now an 8th grader at Middlebrook and a junior at Wilton High School. They have been challenged, inspired to work hard, and thrived in our years here. The taxes are sky high and our mortgage is not easy to swing – but we do it, for the schools.

This is why I am writing to you as one of the countless parents in opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874.

These bills:

1) Do not improve our children's education

The best overall academic achievements are in elementary schools with fewer than 500 students and high schools with fewer than 1,000.

Regionalized schools have longer commutes. Historically they have less parent volunteering and extracurricular participation, as well as more truancy and an increased dropout rate.

2) Do not save taxpayers money

The most cost-effective districts have fewer than 5,000 students.

Many of our state's large districts – ie Hartford, New Haven, Stamford – have high costs, while many of our small districts have average or low costs. In the smaller districts, the cost reductions are trivial and represent a small fraction of the state's educational spending. In essence, the benefits are offset by implementation costs.

3) Hurt our communities

These bills damage property values. That, in turn, harms our tax bases. They make it harder to attract new taxpayers and businesses.

This is evidenced by the fact that this statewide discussion has already created market confusion that discourages new families from moving to Connecticut and encourages existing families to leave. *Our family will be one of them if this issue is not resolved quickly and completely.*

The market uncertainty hanging over our state, in turn damages home values while these bills are considered. That damage would continue while families are held hostage awaiting the judgement of a government commission.

4) Hurt disadvantaged students the most.

At-risk students do better in smaller school districts. The optimal school size for disadvantaged students is elementary schools up to 300 students and high schools up to 600.

Regionalization shifts these students into unfamiliar environments where they are less likely to thrive. In addition, larger districts are less connected with their local communities. Teachers are less involved, which can negatively impact the overall education, tipping the difference between success and failure for disadvantaged students.

One size fits NONE

Regionalization does not work – it has failed in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont . Does Connecticut really want to be next, at the risk of losing mass amounts of the families who live and work here?

All of the above facts are available in *K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons and Surprises*. Unequivocally rejecting these bills would save Connecticut from a disastrous fiscal, educational, and economic mistake.

Hands Off Our Schools

Reject these bills, and you will protect parents and teachers who want to maintain our strong voices within our local communities. Our voices have joined together to say “Hands Off Our Schools” in a growing movement made up of thousands upon thousands of families from every region of Connecticut, every background, and every walk of life.

We are united by a desire to protect our local schools from the threats of forced or coerced regionalization. We want to defeat these bills and then defeat the politicians who support them. Why? Because it is what’s best for our kids.

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