

Testimony Regarding Forced Regionalization Bills:

SB 738

SB 457

SB 874

As a resident of Woodstock, and a former Board of Education member, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

Many residents are publicly opposing the adoption and/or study of school regionalization. I have read their impassioned letters noting the importance of community involvement in education, great academic outcomes and their community's collective willingness to expend funds on education. I have also read the statistics about school outcomes, before and after regionalization, and find the data driven protests informative and interesting. All great points, but what is missing? The perspective of those of us living in towns who already do a great job making the most of their education dollars.

Woodstock is located in "The Quiet Corner." The Quiet Corner is comprised of rural towns with small populations. Our communities are agrarian. We don't have large school populations. We do take up a lot of the state's "real estate," as the towns are geographically large. For the most part, our 9-12 schools are regionalized and our K-8 schools are not. On a yearly basis, the Woodstock community spends approximately \$3,000 below the state cost per pupil spending average. What happens, in a post-regionalization era, to the already strapped municipal budgets of those towns whose spending is significantly less than the state average? We don't have a large commercial tax base. The majority of our taxes are raised from residential property holdings. Our local leaders have proudly and responsibly managed our municipal budget for years. We have gone without many amenities, public safety provisions (including municipal law enforcement) and proper assistance from the state, to achieve our financial goals. Historically, the state has left our community to shoulder over 50% of our local education costs. We have just learned that this burden will increase as our ECS funds are slated to decrease over the next five years under the proposed revised ECS calculation.

If we regionalize, there is only one way for our education costs to go, and that is up. There are two drivers contributing to my conclusion. The first is based on the simple belief that regionalization is not going to lower the cost per pupil spending to a level that is \$3,000 less than the current average. School districts with averages that exceed or far exceed the current average have a better opportunity to lower their municipal education costs. For municipalities on the far end of the other side of the equation, we can only expect an increase in costs. Our conundrum – we need to look to our comparatively diminutive tax base to make up the shortfall. The second, is based on my belief that local leaders are more efficient at making the hard choices when budgets need to be trimmed. Do you cut teaching assistants or buy new text books? Do you increase class size? Give up your self-funded insurance plan, which yields gains in some years and tremendous losses in others? I've served on our Board of Education and had the misfortune of making these difficult decisions. The upside was that we received sound advice, which included statistics and specificity, when we were making these decisions. The choices are so specific to class size, needs of the current student population by grade, standardized test scores, infrastructure

conditions and other factors, some of which are unpredictable. Regionalization will remove the critical “school building” information needed to make the most cost-effective decisions during tough budget times.

Connecticut municipalities carry the state when it comes to paying for education. On average, we foot 54% of the bill. There only four other states in the country with lower municipal contribution rates. If the State wants to govern how we spend our education dollars, it should increase its share of the pie. Instead it wants to take control of our municipal funds -- our funds, which in our town, have been responsibly managed to-date. If the goal of regionalization is to truly manage those towns with excessive education costs, there are other ways to address overspending. For example, town specific penalties, with remediation periods, can be imposed. I do know that regionalization, and its tie to ECS funds, will punish responsible towns like Woodstock. A punishment that is unduly served.

I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457, SB 874 and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michele Woz

Woodstock, CT