

Testimony Opposed to SB-738: An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts

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I am a life-long resident of East Haddam. I attended and thrived in the East Haddam Public School System from kindergarten through high school, when I graduated fourth in my class of eighty-three students. I loved our small town and small school. The only challenge I found in our school system was limited course offerings, which was overcome with creative solutions like virtual A.P. classes, and attending classes at Middlesex Community College. Because of these unique opportunities, I was able to transfer credits from high school to college.

After high school, I intentionally chose a small college in Massachusetts, because I was used to the small school experience. After graduating summa cum laude one semester early (thanks to transferred high school credits), I enrolled in Quinnipiac University School of Law, which is another extraordinarily small school. I graduated magna cum laude and went on to be admitted to the Connecticut Bar. I specifically chose my educational and career pathway to lead me back to East Haddam, where I now practice law, own a home, and am raising our toddler with my husband, who is another East Haddam Public School graduate.

I believe you would find me more than qualified to speak on the subject of East Haddam Schools. My husband and I attended them, pay taxes to fund them, volunteer for community organizations to support them, and plan on sending our son to them.

This deep connection to our schools is why I urge you to vote against the forced regionalization proposed in Senate Bill 738. I intentionally chose to live in a rural town with ample wooded parks and family-focused community. This bill has written off the irreplaceable

value of small towns, and has labeled our municipality as cursed and inadequate, for housing less than forty thousand residents.

The stated purpose of this bill is to “create a more efficient educational system.” I ask you: what is more efficient than direct parental access and a short commute for students and volunteers? I fear that a regional school district will stamp out the voices of East Haddam parents, who have just as much right to be involved in their children’s education as those from more populous towns. Our Probate District includes Marlborough, Portland, and East Hampton. We are outnumbered by residents of these towns by three to one. Right now, East Haddam parents can speak directly to their school district and every resident has an equal opportunity to be heard. If we are outnumbered in this dramatic re-structuring of the school district, what assurance do we have that our school board will still directly respond to our localized, unique concerns? The answer: we have no such assurance.

Furthermore, if our schools were to close, in the name of “efficiency,” children would have to travel to school in a neighboring town. This significant time spent commuting, they could be with their families, supplementing their class time with homework or private study, or exercising their minds and bodies with crucial playtime. East Haddam is the eighth largest town in Connecticut in terms of its area, which makes travel from one end to the other substantial in and of itself. If parents and volunteers were required to go even further, I feel the school would suffer for lack of support and parental involvement.

Education is not the place to make bottom-dollar decisions. High-quality schools draw families for long-term investment in communities, and education is the finest tool we have to build a better future. Please, do not sacrifice our children and families for this state’s poor financial management. Vote against Senate Bill 738.