

Public Hearing Testimony

Co-Chairman Senator McCroy and Representative Sanchez, Distinguished Ranking Members Senator Berthel and Representative McCarthy and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Patrick Filley and I oppose SB Bills 738 (aka 454), 457, 874 and HB 1071 regarding school regionalization and teachers pensions for the following reasons.

Let me start by saying that the only responsible position for an Educational Committee on any bill that comes before them that does not contain a stated goal of improved or maintained, at current level, education is to vote it down. None of these bills even begins to discuss improving education and therefore should be voted down.

It is also distressing to note that in a budget that basically skips over jobs and economic development, the outcome of all of these bills will be a loss of jobs. As you cut the workplace for these jobs (superintendents, special ed teachers, etc.) you are also going to add to the already unacceptable exodus of citizens from the state.

Yes, consolidation and pushing expenses, particularly those cited in HB 1071, back on towns sounds like an easy way to put money in state coffers and potentially save money. But this is a lazy and, in the case of regionalization, wrong headed assumption. Before voting on these bills, every member of the Committee should be required to read the Hartford Foundation on Public Giving's 2018 report (K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons, Surprises http://www.hfpg.org/files/1815/2595/9230/Hartford_Foundation_K-12_Regionalization_Report_05-08-18.pdf) which concludes:

"Most importantly, regionalization of school districts does not always lead to reductions in expenditures – neither short-term nor long-term. Furthermore, promoting regionalization from a perspective of being cost-effective must also consider that "...students and communities may be losing their voices and power through the application of a business practice [mergers] found to have a 50% failure rate."

If business mergers are successful only half of the time and a business perspective is used to justify regionalization, then why would regionalization have a higher success rate?....

Policies that call for wholesale regionalization based on imposed criteria (e.g., minimum/maximum number of students) can have unpredictable, and often adverse, consequences.”

Reference has been made to the success of Vermont in regionalization. Yes, they passed an article in 2015 requiring regionalization by 2019. However, Vermont has 264 school districts servicing 89,624 students. Connecticut has 170 school districts servicing 550,954 students. The math is simple, an average of 340 students per district compared to 3,241. Yet 31 school districts in Vermont are still in court fighting this and Stowe has basically said they will drop all state aid on education and run their own. Do you really think that passage of any of these bills will not lead to some legal challenges by Connecticut towns?

Further, these bills (excepting HB 1071), despite all the verbiage around them, require (or leave open the possibility of) in one form or another FORCED regionalization. The state has procedures in place, right down to the language on ballots, for regionalization and we currently have 17 regional districts. In the case of SB 738, those procedures will be amended. For the existing districts are they grandfathered? Will they be reformed along the lines of probate courts—oh that idea, let’s take probate court districts, some formed in the 1600s and some revised as recently 2011, and make them the guidelines for regionalization.

Finally, ask yourselves why the rhetoric is “we have to make some hard decisions,” but there is little to no mention of bringing jobs to the state and no concrete economic development planning suggested in the budget. Many people move to this state for its reputation in education. Many people move within the state for perceived improvement in education. You cannot make education one size fits all. The potential fallout from these proposed bills is not something you can reverse. Do not put hoped for short term financial gain for Hartford on the backs of all the students and taxpayers of this state.