



11 High Gate Lane, West Hartford, CT 06107-1010  
Phone/Fax 860.519.0023  
www.ct-asbo.org

### Testimony on Senate Bills #454 & #738

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and members of the Education Committee, my name is David Fiorillo and I am the Director of School Business Operations for a small district in Connecticut. I have worked as a School Business Official for more than 10 years in Public, Private, and Charter Schools across multiple states. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO). Thank you for the opportunity today to share my thoughts regarding proposed SB454 and SB738.

Regionalization has been an important and successful part of our education system for many years. Currently in Connecticut ~24,000 students attend 17 regional schools operating in 47 towns. In all cases these were formed voluntarily by various municipalities cooperating together to realize cost efficiencies as well as improve education outcomes. It is important to note that these regional school districts were formed after exhaustive reviews and research taking into consideration the financial and education impacts, and the special characteristics of each community. A one size fits all approach does not work.

With this in mind, I would now like to discuss some of the pros and cons of regionalization.

Declining enrollments challenge the ability for districts to continue to offer and maintain certain programs, one solution to these challenges may be regionalization. At the core of the proposed bills appears to be the idea that with regionalization we as a State can achieve financial efficiencies and improve educational outcomes. Regionalization efforts may include reducing staff levels, maintaining fewer buildings, and lowering overall salaries/wages.

Conversely, regionalization may lead to diseconomies of scale. This may include higher transportation costs related to longer bus routes, an increased number of mid-level administrators and support staff, and the overall increase in staff salaries, related to seniority and contract renegotiation, the leveling up of the combined staff.

First let's look at the idea of regionalization with respect to reducing staffing levels. Specifically exploring the superintendents' role. The reality is that superintendents working in small districts likely take on additional roles that superintendents of large districts don't. In my district, we do not currently have an assistant superintendent. If we were to regionalize with another district, the combined schools would not need two superintendents, however they would now likely need an assistant superintendent position, likely negating most of the salary savings. The same case could likely be made for other positions as well, but not all. Additionally, many small districts employ a part-time superintendent or share a superintendent with another district.

Another area for consideration with regionalization is school facilities. Unfortunately, this gets complicated when it comes to ownership of property. Regional school districts own the school buildings, while school districts within a Town do not. School buildings are typically funded with state and local funding likely through a debt issuance. Discussions would need to take place between Towns about the property and associated debt. Furthermore, different towns may have different maintenance standards for property, disproportionately impacting one over the other. We should also consider the upfront costs of reconfiguring existing classrooms and technology. I can say with confidence, that many small towns will not be supportive of closing an elementary school, regardless of size. The highest success for maintaining fewer buildings within a region would be at the Middle and High School levels.

Finally let's address school personnel costs related to regionalization. As you know, schools are a people-based service. In my district, 80% of our budget is people. Regionalization does not necessarily mean there will be less teachers and higher-class sizes. It's also worth noting that existing school districts do not need to regionalize to increase the average class size, they have the ability to do that already. Please also consider, when you align teacher contracts the new region may choose to raise all salaries up to the highest contract level, not the lowest.

It's worth noting that collaborative efforts have already been taking place among many districts. These have created efficiencies through collective bidding, shared services, and joint classes to name a few. There are also a number of whitepapers and studies that go into the details about the topics mentioned today that I would be happy to share with you (please see attached – CASBO's *Shared Services White Paper* and Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's *K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut*).

In closing, regionalization if done well can achieve financial efficiencies and improve educational outcomes. I would encourage the committee to focus on regionalization efforts at the Middle and High School levels, help with the challenges related to building ownership, and assist with issues related to town charters and controls.

Given the complexities of regionalization I do not feel the two bills introduced would support those efforts.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak.