

Testimony Regarding Mandatory Regional School Districts
Thomas W. Giard III, Superintendent, Waterford Public Schools
Bill Nos. SB457, SB738, and SB874
February 28, 2019

My name is Thomas W. Giard III and I am the Superintendent of Schools for the Waterford Public Schools in Waterford, CT. I have been the Superintendent in Waterford for the last four years. Our district has approximately 2,550 students spread out across five schools; three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. I am writing to comment on several proposed bills that mandate regional school districts.

In my experience, the passage of any bill mandating regional school districts for a district our size would have a significant detrimental effect on already existing regional collaborative efforts as well as the multitude of shared services we have already implemented with our town. Like Waterford Public Schools, I believe many districts across the state have done similar arrangements.

Waterford Public Schools has many existing collaborative relations with other districts. Our entire RESC-region of LEARN maintains the regional calendar concept even though the mandate was eliminated. This has allowed the many districts in the region to continue regional professional development servicing 463 educators in certain teaching areas. It has also allowed Waterford to maintain certain special education transportation arrangements we share with other districts.

In addition, Waterford shares a Teacher of the Blind with Groton. Neither one of us needs a full-time employee in this area, but by sharing this staff member it has allowed us to ensure we are meeting students' needs in our two districts, a need we would have had great difficulty meeting if we both searched for a part-time Teacher of the Blind. In addition, we have joint grant applications and arrangements with surrounding districts through the Inter-district Cooperative Grants. Again, this maximizes efficiency and services for students. Waterford has a growing English Learners population more than doubling in the last four years from 33 students to 69 students. With that said, our EL numbers do not compare to our neighboring urban district of New London. The individual students' needs in our district are not less than their peers in New London though. With that said, we have partnered with New London Schools throughout the years to share in professional learning opportunities for our EL teachers that we would not have otherwise been able to provide for our staff and students. Another example is the collaboration around the changes in student expulsion. The recent expulsion law changes have made the cost to educate expelled students much higher than in the past. Rather than each district creating their own costly "full-time" expulsion program, East Lyme is sending a student to Waterford's expulsion program.

I fear that through forced, mandated regionalization these efforts and existing relationships will be nullified. While some may sight that mandated regionalization will save more money than efforts such as these, one only has to look to other neighboring New England states that have undertaken mandatory regionalization to see that economic efficiencies are far less than what was projected.

The other area that Waterford and many districts already have undertaken is shared services with our municipality. Waterford Public Schools and the Town of Waterford share seven (7) significant areas of shared services, through shared departments and shared resources, which may be eliminated or compromised with forced regional school districts. Waterford Public Schools and the Town of Waterford maintain four (4) shared departments in Human Resources, Facilities Management, Grounds Management, and Information Technology. These departments are combined departments that service both the schools and the municipality.

In addition to the four (4) shared departments, Waterford Public Schools has also collaborated with the Town of Waterford in three (3) shared resources and agreements that mutually benefit the Town and District. The schools and the Waterford Police Department share in the cost of our two School Resource Officers and have a formalized Memorandum of Understanding outlining the cooperative arrangement. Waterford Public Schools and the Town of Waterford also realize other significant economic efficiency by joint bids and joint purchasing arrangements. The school district and the town also pool health insurance and share one self-insured fund for the purposes of managing ever-increasing health insurance costs.

I am a firm believer in the law of unintended consequences; that the actions of people always have effects that are unanticipated and unintended. My message today is a simple one. Most if not all school districts maintain regional collaborative efforts already and many maintain existing collaborative shared services with their town. Passing more legislation to mandate these efforts is not necessarily the answer. I encourage you to consider incentive-based programs that further enhance these already existing efforts.