

Statement of Lisa Grandjean Carlson  
Education Committee Public Hearing  
March 1, 2019

**With Concern for : SB 738, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS.**

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Lisa Grandjean Carlson. I live in Haddam. In the first ten years of marriage, as a young married couple, we lived in Middletown to take advantage of social activities and restaurants. When we decided to start a family, we desired a high-performing school system where parents were involved in the education of their children and wanted to ensure that if necessary, there would be quality special education services for students. We valued low class sizes. We knew we would have to pay higher real estate and taxes to obtain those things. We ultimately decided on Regional School District 17 serving students of Haddam, Higganum, Haddam Neck and Killingworth. We have amazingly dedicated teachers and staff that work with students to reach their personal best, all the while our district performs well above state standards. My children, who have different special needs and IEPs, receive incredible support from student services and our communication to and from the school are wonderful.

It sounds like Utopia, doesn't it? Until this year, it has been.

Regional School District 17 is comprised of three elementary schools. Two are located in Higganum and one is located in Killingworth. The middle school is located in Killingworth and the high school in Higganum. All schools are owned by the Regionalized school district, not the towns. The majority of the students reside in Haddam, therefore the Haddam taxpayers pay more, but the board membership is equal. Our school district by geographic territory is large. Some students that live in Haddam Neck have to travel through the East Haddam School District, cross the bridge over the Connecticut River and continue to ride nearly an hour in inclement weather to attend our middle school in Killingworth.

In light of some declining enrollment and in trying to determine the best utilization of properties and resources, our regionalized school board began a tremendous undertaking and ultimately made a proposal to close the best performing elementary school, Haddam Elementary School as it is also the oldest school. Perhaps you have seen it in the news. I've included a link to a recent Middletown Press article for your review. The problem is that the school sits in what can only be described as the "downtown" area where the majority of town businesses exist- pharmacy, package store, grocery store, post office and various restaurants. It's at the intersection where the two main arterial roads that connect our district meet. The committee recommending this decision has an unequal membership, made of three members of Killingworth and just two members from Haddam. Killingworth Board of Education members and their town residents wouldn't be affected by this closure, but it would have incredible impact on Higganum/Haddam town, business owners and residents whose property values have already started to decline after

the Board voted to close the school. There has become an unhealthy level of discourse between the town residents and between parents and the Board of Education because the Board is making decisions without truly weighing the impact on the town and the town has no say about what happens to the building because it doesn't own it. Recently, the Board held a Request for Proposal process where only one proposal was received offering \$450,000 - \$650,000 for a school and land overlooking the Connecticut River that exceeds a valuation of more than \$3M. A problem ensues whereas the Town of Haddam had first right of refusal and that never transpired.

If the State should choose to push for regionalization, communities that share schools should hold the same values and most importantly, safeguards should be put in place with respect to ensuring that the towns continue to own the school. Additionally, there is no way for people of the town to hold a no confidence vote to remove members of the Board of Education that do not listen to their constituency. They can do whatever they want with no recourse. Why should a regionalized school district hold so much power? Something must be done to stop it. The power that the Board of Education has in our town to impact so much is criminal.

Please reach out if I can provide more information.

Day, C. (2019, February 27). Haddam-Killingworth residents blast school closing, lack of transparency. *The Middletown Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.middletownpress.com/news/article/Haddam-Killingworth-residents-blast-school-13650048.php>