

Dear Committee Members, State Representative Labriola, and State Senator Berthel:

My name is Paula Guillet. I am a 28+ year resident and homeowner in the Town of Oxford where I have served 12 years on our Board of Education. I've served on all the committees, Policy, Facilities & Transportation, Finance & Personnel, Curriculum and Communication, Union Contract Negotiations, and Superintendent Searches; as Chair and Vice Chair; and on our local RESC's Board. I have been elected on both the Democratic and Republican tickets.

I am strongly opposed to Bills # SB 738, SB 457, SB 874, HB 7319, SB 454, HB 7150, and any other bills mandating "forced" regionalization or redistricting, incentives that are penalties for non-compliance, mechanisms to automatically become law on the advice of a study or committee, property taxes going directly to the state, and giving any Board of Education the power as a taxing authority.

With some of the language I've read, I have to question the real intent of these bills?

Simply put, bigger is not better, don't fix what's not broken, and you can't bring the cities up by bringing the towns down.

"Forced" regionalization is short sighted and would NOT be more cost-effective or efficient in our state, considering how we operate, and contrary to what someone in business may think. Our children are not products. They are not something you can just write off as a loss when a poor decision is made and we didn't get to billions in debt by good decision making. Education and student learning encompass many factors and components that complicate the picture, all of which add to the cost.

First and foremost, the quality of Connecticut education is rated in the top 5 nationwide and has been for many years, one of the few positive ratings this state still has going for it. Changing the very core of how our education system operates on the pretense of efficiency and not carefully studying the impact on quality, student learning and success, is foolish & shortsighted especially considering our current financial state; and certainly doesn't address the real issues.

Dealing with the unions alone, will offset any savings on merging services and overhead.

More layers of administration will significantly add to the cost of education, further reducing funds where they most needed most which is in the schools and the classroom.

These bills also stand to have a serious impact not only on our education but a domino effect across our state regarding real estate, home values, property taxes, businesses, the working class, and the economy; all of which is connected & currently struggling.

Many of the towns and smaller cities are not as wealthy as their "averages" make them appear on paper.

Property value is not cash. And currently there are not a lot of people who can afford to buy or maintain homes in CT due to the poor economy and high cost of living. Continuing to drive up property taxes is unfair to the already struggling working class and homeowner in this overly taxed state, and will only make homeownership less affordable to those in lower income brackets.

Continuing to drive businesses and the working middle class out of state, only adds to the declining student enrollment we are facing, and further reduces the state's tax base which not only funds the education system, it funds the state.

Many districts are already regionalized and others may benefit by "voluntarily" regionalizing and/or merging services. Discussion with Superintendents and district Business managers about what could be done to remove obstacles and cumbersome state regulations to make it more feasible would make more sense than penalizing them or "forcing" them based on some arbitrary number of students.

Many of the inequities we are facing in education spending between districts were created by state statutes and labor laws, many of which are outdated. Negotiating union contracts on a town's alleged ability to pay and through binding arbitration seriously needs to be addressed.

Unfunded state mandates, unrealistic services & contract obligations, lack of common sense priorities, further drive up spending. Every year, more laws & policy changes are passed, lots of feel good stuff, requiring more work and data by educators and state services, with little if any thought as to priority, impact or COST! Every bill should have an associated cost with it before it can be passed.

It was also the State that required a Superintendent in every district, whether it was K-8 or K-12, and regardless of size. However, removing a Superintendent in smaller district's would only result in hiring another highly paid administrator in their place as someone would still have to do the work they are doing, as most are very accessible and hands on in their district. That also applies to a small town's central office skeleton crew.

There are also many factors feeding the education gap in the cities which pouring money on isn't fixing and we should be taking a different perspective. Immigration, it takes several years for a child to transition and learn English, this is reflected in test scores. Even CAFE talked about this at their conference.

Illegal immigration, how much does this cost?? And why is our struggling working class expected to pay it? Why are we funding people who have been here for 20 years and haven't even applied for citizenship? Where is their tax money?

Crime, why when inner city teenagers are apprehended for committing a crime, in a stolen car, running from police, smashing the car into others, risking lives, and on top of it, have drugs and guns on them, why are they released without a bond? Yeah, man, no big deal, go to court on the 15th. Where is the consequence? What are they learning? Crime pays better than education at least that's how these JV's see it. Where are they going to end up? One night in jail would prevent years in jail down the road. My father-in-law left my ex-husband in jail for a night for screwing up when he was young. He learned.

Poverty, drugs, lack of parental involvement, culture, gangs, guns, I could go on.

Why don't a lot of inner city kids stay in school? Is the HS curriculum really going to help them in life? Help them become a productive member of society? Not everyone is going to college. For numerous reasons money isn't going to fix the problems, and again, you can't raise the cities by lowering the towns. People moved out of the cities, not because of race but because of crime.

Our district carefully examined regionalization with neighboring towns before we built our HS, and we voted against it, as did our neighboring town for many good reasons. Studies consistently showed that smaller districts provided better learning environments & educationally outperformed larger districts. Lack of say, input, and local control, different goals & priorities, unfair costs, logistics, surrounding districts that wanted out of their regions but couldn't get out, we're just some of the reasons. Smaller districts are more successful because they can curb their priorities and goals as needed.

When comparing us to other states that have regionalized districts, look at the quality of education first, and in regards to spending, it's not comparing apples with apples when you factor in the cost of living, teachers' salaries, contracts, special needs, and the amount of non-education items CT has shifted into our education budgets in the past few decades.

If these bills have anything to do with improving education and spending in the big cities, then examine the state's actions & policies, and instead of penalizing small towns for what they are doing right, learn from them and address the real issues to fix the cities. People do care and do what to help.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Paula Guillet