

Testimony on SB 738, SB 457, SB 874 and HB 7150

February 28, 2019

To the members of the hearing committee:

I am writing as a concerned parent to express my strong **opposition** to Senator Looney & Senator Duffs proposed bills **SB 738- An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts, SB 457- An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts and SB 874- An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut and HB 7150- Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education** which would force regionalization of Connecticut public school.

I am a lifelong resident of Connecticut. I grew up in West Hartford during the 70's and 80's where I received a cookie-cutter K-12 public education. I was a good kid, athletic, a rule follower.....and a struggling underachiever. It was very easy for me to slip under the radar because I was just a number to the administration and teachers. Never once did I have a single conversation with any of my 3 different school principals. They didn't greet us in the morning, walk the hallways or visit classrooms. Principals didn't engage students unless it was disciplinary reasons. So, my husband and I were very deliberate when we made our choice to reside in a small town. We specifically chose Canton due to the proximity to our respective hometowns of Simsbury and West Hartford, but most importantly, we wanted our two children to have a more personalized educational experience.

It is now our 10th year in Canton and we could not have made a better choice as we are so tremendously grateful for our small-town schools. From the administrators (principal, office staff, janitors, nurses right down to the lunch ladies), teachers and staff members who not only know each pupil by name, but truly know the child. Our town achieves this because we embrace the importance of setting low class size policies which we strictly enforce. These smaller classes invite personal attention and individualized instruction to children. With this it only strengthens the student-teacher bonds which ultimately translates to academic success. In addition, this intimacy allows for a more student driven school experience. Each child is given individual attention to their own specific needs. Last year, this became vital for my family as both of my children were identified with ADHD (son) and ADD (daughter) but identified Dyslexic as well.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability (SLD) that is neurobiological in origin. Dyslexia impacts reading, specifically decoding and accurate fluency, word recognition and spelling. These struggles typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. My children most definitely struggle - but my local administration is phenomenal at keeping me in the loop. We work together,

collaborating often to make sure each of their specific needs are met. They are offered every opportunity to succeed. However, continued success requires control to stay local where low class size is understood and implemented and where I have a voice in the resources for my children. It is imperative to keep local control here, in Canton, where it belongs, so we can continue to hold our local boards accountable.

Further, I cannot fathom the thought of my ADHD son and ADD daughter commuting to school. Their current bus ride is 30 minutes to and from school. Transporting them to a neighboring town would require a 2+ hour daily commute. That's more than 10 hours a week/40 hour a month riding a school bus. It is proven that physical exercise helps children manage their ADHD. Movement turns on the brain's attention networks and eases other symptoms, such as hyperactivity. Physical activity also has a positive effect on behavior and motivation, resulting in better school performance and better self-esteem. Don't even get me started on inclement weather and the exorbitated expense this would incur. Trust that I can certainly find other more productive things for my children to do with those 40 hours!!!

Additionally, my 8th grade son frequently stays after school to receive extra support from his teachers. If he was transported out of town, this would pose an additional burden, expense and time restraint on me since I would have to commute to pick him up from tutoring. If I could not coordinate a pick up, then my child would lose this extra help. Often, this assistance is the deciding factor to his success on projects, quizzes and exams. Please note, this extra help has catapulted Evan's success where he has now achieved High Honors or Distinguished Honors every single semester since his identification. Please know, this is no small feat for a Dyslexic kid!

As a former PTO Vice President and involved parent, I have witnessed countless benefits of locally run public schools. Canton is a fiscally responsible town. Our Board of Education and Board of Finance along with many passionate town citizens scrutinize our town budgets annually. My children are educated in a nurturing environment where teacher engagement is high, class size is kept low (which is the key to my children's success), individualized student learning is understood and acknowledged, and high achievement is our true measure of success. Citizens in my community have a voice and we are heard. Our Board of Education truly listens to parent feedback. I fear a larger regionalized school district would make it more challenging for me to engage in the education process.

As I mentioned, I was a mere number among hundreds. I am incredibly thankful to have the means to offer my children a small-town educational experience where not only everyone knows their names.... but knows what my kids need to succeed and overcome their Specific Learning Disabilities.

It is apparent regionalization would have compound negative effects such as lower student achievement, disengaged teachers, higher teacher turnover and a one size fits all method of education that ignores significant variation.

Though I understand how economies of scale appear attractive from a fiscal standpoint, this bill attacks our most precious asset as a community and as a state - the quality of our schools. If approved, this bill would only accelerate the outflow of residents, many of whom came to this state for the schools, further eroding state revenue and worsening the state's fiscal crisis not to mention the continued decline of property values. In addition, as I've mentioned, I am certain that the geographical incompatibility of the surrounding towns near Canton would increase transportation costs exponentially, thereby negating any savings offered and would only succeed in eliminating local control and harming school quality.

For these reasons, I implore your support in **opposing SB 738, SB 457, SB 874 and HB 7150** or any other efforts to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen D. Howard, Canton Connecticut