

## TESTIMONY

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Education Committee Public Hearing  
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### **OPPOSE: Proposed S.B. Bill 457– AN ACT CONCERNING THE SIZE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

### **OPPOSE: Proposed S.B. Bill 738– AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Deborah Hoyt. In 1994 my husband and I made the decision to begin our life together in a small Connecticut town of 7,000 residents to raise our newborn twin sons in a close-knit community with strong family values and a public-school system with a good reputation.

25 years later with our sons grown and off on their own – one as State Law Enforcement Officer in Georgia and the other serving in the U.S Military Special Forces – we are grateful for the fundamentals they received growing up in a rural school system with caring teachers and athletic coaches along with the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities which would forever instill their value of public service.

Although we no longer have school-age children, I am here to Oppose Senate Bills 457 An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts and 738 An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts.

**Both of these proposed bills will essentially destroy what is unique about Connecticut’s 169 towns and cities by forcing small tight-knit community-friendly schools into impersonal “big box” regionalized districts.**

This legislation is proposing a fundamental shift that will forever change the fabric and landscape of our State. There are few things that are actually working in Connecticut. Our current approach to education, athletics, music and the arts *is working* – particularly in our smaller towns.

Forcing change for the purpose of randomly grouping towns to meet population quotas will undo the hard work that our teachers, coaches, administrators and parents have worked so hard to achieve.

School regionalization is not a political issue. This is not about race, integration, cultural diversity, small versus large, cross-town bussing or saving money. This is about how our

children learn, grow, discover their talents, find themselves and their social identity, learn about a sense of community and preparing to be a responsible and productive member of society. This is the work of the Legislative Education Committee. We are entrusting you to make good decisions for our State on the delivery of education to *our* children, *your* children, people's grandchildren and future generations.

Realigning towns to create school districts with a total population of 40,000 residents and a minimum of 2,000 students all in the name of saving administrative overhead equates to decimating our school identity and values. We will be abandoning our town greens, small classrooms and individualized student attention and replace it with warehousing our students in large impersonal institutions.

School is more than a place that our children go 8 hours a day. It's their social and support network. It's their source of meals – in some cases the only meals they may have access to. It's their sense of identity – whether they play football, baseball, basketball, a musical instrument in the school band, or just cheer on their classmates. School is their family, their sense of belonging, their source of pride and forever will be a place they call home.

If you recall your own high school days, I bet that a few vivid memories will include playing on a sports team, acting in a school play or performing in the band. If you attended a small or medium sized school, you may not have been the best athlete, actor or musician, but you had the *opportunity* to play and participate. Regionalization would increase competition in all areas – athletics, academics, the arts and in social circles. Only the best and brightest students will have the opportunity to experience and grow their personal talents. The late bloomer, the shy child, the one with a disability will be cut from the team, be lost in a large impersonal school system and potentially miss the opportunity to develop the skills to realize their dream.

I am fully in favor of cost efficiency and addressing our State budget challenges, however, forced regionalization is State overreach. Every school district already goes through the painful exercise of presenting their annual school budget to their town residents for approval. Passing the school budget often takes 2 or 3 attempts. Teachers are cut. Services are cut. But the residents of each town – the parents – the voters – the taxpayers are making the decisions that will impact their children locally in their school.

What additional cost cutting will regionalization achieve? Will the current buildings be consolidated? Will the guidance offices, nurses and health services be reduced and located in only one of the school buildings? Will parents need to drive further to pick children up from school? What about class sizes? Will we lose what we value most - our school identity, our town name and just be referred to as a "region number"?

If we truly want to improve Connecticut and retain families, businesses and an educated workforce, we need to think hard about forcing regionalization of our schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views and testify before you.