

February 28th, 2019

Good afternoon Chairs and members of the Education Committee,

I am writing in opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874, as both a parent of children in the Ridgefield public school system and as an advocate for homeschooling families. Although the original intent of this bill may have been to save money, improve schools, and protect children, I can assure you that, should these bills pass, quite the opposite will occur. These bills will NOT improve our children's education, they will NOT save our taxpayers money, they WILL increase budgets across the board, they WILL harm our children and they WILL harm our state.

These bills damage property values, which then harm our tax bases. Given the state of our current real estate market, how do you think that passing such bills will help? One of the main reasons that people move to our town, and many towns here in Connecticut, is because of our schools. They are in high demand and people pay a pretty penny to have their children enrolled in these schools. These bills would make it incredibly hard to attract new taxpayers and businesses to our state. Given the fact that attracting and keeping people in our state is already an immense issue, why would you propose legislation that furthers this?? Are you seeking to collapse the state? The ambiguity in these bills is already creating massive panic and confusion which is discouraging new families from moving to Connecticut and is encouraging families that already reside here to pack their bags. Lifelong residents that have been active participants in their communities are ready to leave the state. Is this what you are looking for?

Have you extensively studied the negative impact of regionalized schools in other states? Research clearly shows that children have longer commutes, and transportation costs are higher. They have less parental involvement and less extracurricular participation. Their rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, truancy and dropouts are much higher. I encourage you to do some poking around and you will quickly arrive at the same conclusion.

The best overall academic achievements are in schools with fewer than 1,000 students and the most cost-effective districts have fewer than 5,000 students. Many of Connecticut's large districts such as Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford have high costs, while many of our smaller districts have average or low costs. So tell me again how regionalization and redistricting will help?

Connecticut's current state statutes regarding a parent educator's obligations are quite clear and do not require any new legislation. The homeschooling community is functioning quite fine on its own and does not need any further oversight from the state. For what reason do you feel that it is necessary for parent educators to formally appear to the Department of Education on an annual basis? Do parents who maintain their children in the public school system have this requirement? In private schools? No. So, from what I can see, that is blatant discrimination and educational profiling. Just one more foot in the door for eroding parental rights. Furthermore, parent educators do not require "model curricula and frameworks in reading and mathematics" be provided to them by the Department of Education. These standards are already available on the website for those that wish to access them, and many parents choose to go above and beyond those standards when educating their children. That is in fact one of the many reasons that parents choose to home educate - so that they can provide MORE, and of a higher quality and rate of individualization, to their children than the state does.

Regarding the comment that registration is needed so that “DCF can cross-check families with investigations so that no case of neglect goes unnoticed because of an abusive of the homeschool option” - that is complete and utter nonsense. How many cases of abuse and neglect go unnoticed in the public and private school settings? DCF can’t even handle the caseload that they currently have and they now want to attack home educators on this front? Legislators should not be duped by the horrendous DCF system that has been under federal oversight for decades and is massively failing both children and parents throughout the nation. I am quite aware of how legislative creep works and this is a gateway for further restrictions and God knows what else. No thank you. These bills are a gross overreach of government and I will not stand for it.

Are you aware of the Connecticut Supreme Court case {in the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding v. Rell case 327 Conn. 650 (2018)} cited the court's finding that there is "clear evidence of failing public school, unequal treatment, and illiterate students being graduated" from those public schools. Again, they want homeschoolers to register with those public schools? Not happening. Feel free to read the case by clicking on the link below. You may also read an article published just two days ago about the DCF's public failings. If a department is operating at 50%, don't you think that they need either a major overhaul or to be shut down rather than be expanded?

<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/ct-supreme-court/1886390.html>

<https://ctmirror.org/2019/02/26/federal-monitors-report-in-dcf-case-shows-continued-concerns/>

As it currently stands, there are a multitude of bills across many committees that are infringing on my rights to raise my children in a way that I see fit, that falls in line with my personal and religious beliefs. If the state is going to continue to infringe on my rights, they will soon be paying a high price by losing millions of tax dollars with a massive exodus from the state. Parents will NOT stand by and allow you to strip them of what they have worked hard for - the freedom to live by their own ideals and raise their children in accordance with those principles.

I stand with tens of thousands of parents in opposition. These bills directly undermine the collectively loud voices of parents, teachers and administration within our local schools. We say NO to forced regionalization and forced redistricting. We say NO to regulation of homeschoolers. Please, keep your hands off our schools, and off our children. Everything functions better at the local level and getting the state involved is only going to make matters worse.

I have made my voice heard on maintaining my rights as a parent here in Connecticut and will continue to exercise my rights. I respectfully request that you do NOT let these bills proceed out of committee. Please heed to your constituents and vote NO.

Sincerely,

Dawn Jolly