

February 25, 2019

Re: SB-874, SB-738 and SB-457

Dear Members of the Education Committee:

My name is James Kettle and I am a resident of Wilton, CT. **My testimony below asks the Education Committee to vote “No” on SB-874, SB-738 and SB-457.** I strongly urge you forcefully reject all three bills. Further, I ask the committee to refuse to move forward any new or revised bill that proposes formation of a commission to study possible regionalization or consolidation of public school districts.

Public education is the engine of the state’s economy and Connecticut’s greatest asset. Any of the three proposed bills would do immense damage by placing a dark cloud of lengthy uncertainty over public education and intrinsically-related property values until their earliest-possible effective date of 7/1/21.

Connecticut’s economy is in terrible shape. Our real estate markets are in a depression. Uncertainty created by the proposed study will dig our hole far deeper. Investment capital would avoid Connecticut. Any CEO, unable to assure employees that they could reside in towns with high-quality schools, will surely delay any decision to bring new jobs to Connecticut until the Spring of 2021 at the very earliest.

Approving any commission or study proposed in any of these bills will be the final nail in Connecticut’s economic coffin. Any or all of these bills will greatly accelerate our state’s decline, leaving Connecticut further and further behind the rest of the nation. Our current population exodus will become a flood.

Simply commissioning a study will have dire consequences. The economic peril posed by the study is palpable. Three consecutive Spring real estate market seasons consumed with uncertainty will undercut values and push the state into recession. Meanwhile, unelected commissioners with neither criteria nor accountability would be entitled to create winners and losers among the state’s municipalities. In the meantime, these hugely consequential bills offer but a single chance for public input - on Dec. 15, 2020.

None of the proposed bills focus on improving education outcomes. Rather, the outcome of either regionalization or consolidation will be reduced accountability and insertion of bureaucracy in the way of parents who need to advocate for their children. With traffic in many parts of the state paralyzed, requiring students to spend more time on buses will harm rather than improve educational outcomes.

Yet the leaders of a state in a desperate financial crisis propose to devote untold thousands of hours for highly-paid professionals to gather data, perform analyses and conduct meetings! If you want to help revive Connecticut’s economy, please find ways to cut expenses rather than subvert our greatest asset.

With a Master’s in Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, I submit that regionalization or consolidation of public education is unique in its potential to drastically undermine real estate values. A host of municipal services should be considered for regionalization pilots before public education because they may well reduce costs while maintaining current levels of educational quality – without adversely impacting real estate values. At minimum, such services include public works, health, police and fire, parks and recreation, building inspection, economic development and tax assessment.

Yours truly,
James Kettle

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