

To Whom It Concerns,

I am strongly opposed to Bill 457 and Bill 738 as well as any bills or plans to regionalize school districts. Each town and city is best positioned to control their school systems based on their individual needs and requirements.

While I understand that there may be an economic case for larger school districts, increasing district size also increases bureaucracy and further removes the administration from the stakeholders: students, parents, and town residents. I think CT would be far better served thinking about how it could break up some of the larger districts so that parents have more, not less, influence. At the end of the day, it's the parents (and hopefully the students themselves) who care most about the quality of education in their town or city.

As a younger parent, when my wife and I were living and working in Manhattan, we thought about where to go and considered CT, Westchester, Long Island, and NJ. We decided on Fairfield County primarily because there were several small towns which had great school districts. Ultimately we chose Ridgefield because we felt that the school district and town were the best fit for our family. While there were 'better' school districts (at least in terms of educational outcomes, average SAT scores, etc), we felt that the Ridgefield school district was excellent, we liked the sizes of the individual schools, and the town seemed to share our philosophy regarding the importance of education.

If this 'regionalization' of schools comes to pass and I was still that young father living in Manhattan trying to decide where was the best place to move my family, CT would immediately be cut from the list. I highly doubt that I am alone in that regard, particularly since I've met many folks in my town who moved from NYC as I did for the schools. What happens if young families decide that CT is NOT a good choice? Does the state want to lose highly educated, high tax-paying potential residents to NY or NJ? From my own perspective, I didn't care that much about the tax differences, the education system was paramount in terms of my family's decision.

In addition to turning off new residents with this 'regionalization' effort, I also think that there will be some attrition of CT residents. That may not happen right away (not everyone is able to easily move) but it will happen. For those families who can work from anywhere, like mine, we'd likely just move before this became a reality. If this turns people away from CT or pushes residents to leave CT, that's bad for the CT economy, the tax rolls, property values, and so forth.

I do appreciate that CT is in a bit of a financial crisis, that people on both sides of the aisle are working hard to find solutions, and that there is value in brainstorming and coming up with different ideas and options - but my family and I are against the school district regionalization effort generally and Bills 457 and 738 specifically.

Sincerely,
Rob Lepanto
Ridgefield, CT