



**Testimony
Rudy Marconi
First Selectman, Town of Ridgefield
On behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Education Committee
March 1, 2019**

My name is Rudy Marconi, First Selectman of Ridgefield and I am the President of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), which represents 110 smaller communities throughout Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in ***opposition*** to **SB-738, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS**, which proposes a massive consolidation of school districts throughout Connecticut.

SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION/REGIONALIZATION DOES NOT GUARANTEE SAVINGS

As proposed, SB-738 calls for a plan to force the consolidation of school districts without any consideration of whether consolidation would produce any significant savings. Numerous studies conclude that school district consolidation will not achieve meaningful cost savings due to a variety of factors, such as whether school buildings would need to be renovated to accommodate additional students and how consolidation would affect transportation, personnel, and other operating costs. A one-size-fits-all approach is unworkable.

SB-738 IS BASED ON FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

There is little research-based evidence that indicates that large, consolidated school districts are more efficient. In fact, several studies suggest that deconsolidating larger school districts into smaller districts is more likely to produce savings. Discussions about improving educational efficiencies must be driven by data-based comparisons of spending levels across categories for all school districts.

FORCED SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION/REGIONALIZATION MAY UNDERMINE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

SB-738 fails to include any consideration of how consolidation may affect the quality of education. Many small school districts are located in rural areas where homes are spread out across a wide geographic area. For these students, forced consolidation may result in less time in the classroom and more time on the bus.

SCHOOLS ARE A VITAL PART OF OUR COMMUNITIES

In Connecticut's small towns, schools are a vital part of our communities. Residents of all ages attend plays, concerts, and athletic events to come together as a community to support the



students and each other. In addition, one of the top factors that people consider when buying a home is the quality of the schools.

Please reject SB-738 and, instead, support measures to facilitate voluntary shared services and regional approaches where it is determined that savings can be achieved, and the quality of education preserved.

In addition, COST recommends that lawmakers provide towns with the tools to control education costs by:

➤ **Eliminating the Minimum Budget Requirement**

If the goal is cost savings, give towns and taxpayers the ability to control education costs by eliminating the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) for all non-Alliance school districts. Despite changes to the MBR to provide towns with greater flexibility to reduce education budgets, the MBR continues to be administered in a way that makes it impossible for towns to reduce education costs.

➤ **Addressing concerns with existing regional school districts**

Despite the focus on regionalizing schools, SB-457 fails to address concerns raised by towns currently participating in regional school districts. COST urges lawmakers to focus on addressing these issues, including:

1. Requiring Regional Boards of Education to have a Regional Board of Finance to provide input on education budgets.
2. Allowing the use of a five-year rolling average in determining the Average Daily Membership (ADM) in schools for purposes of calculating member town allocations. ADM, the amount each town within a region is required to pay per student, is currently calculated in October for the following school year. Due to year to year fluctuations in student enrollment, towns are unable to budget effectively.
3. Allow towns to act as and be regarded as a local education agency in order to maximize efficiencies without becoming a regional school district.

➤ **Facilitating the consolidation of non-educational expenditures** - Lawmakers should build on efforts to assist municipalities in facilitating the consolidation of non-education expenditures to achieve cost savings.