

RE: SB #738/454, SB #457, SB #874 and HB #7150

To the honorable members of the Connecticut Education Committee,

My name is Deborah McFadden, I serve on the Wilton Board of Selectmen.

I am here to speak against mandatory school regionalization. Specifically, I am against Senator Looney's SB #738/454, Senator Duff's SB #457 and SB #874.

The first priority of any community should always be the quality of education for students. All decisions should be made at the local level by citizens who are most affected. Carrots not sticks are best to encourage efficiencies and shares services.

In Wilton, we already have successful shared services between the Town and the Schools. The Town and Schools of Wilton have a shared CFO and a shared Facilities Director. There are other shared administration and shared purchasing ranges from fuel to utility agreements. These steps have resulted in real savings.

We are also exploring additional savings with neighboring Towns. We are currently working with Weston on a solar – virtual net metering project.

The key is the decision-making needs to be local and not forced from beyond.

I do not believe forced regionalization will generate the kind of savings we have already experienced.

Regionalization is a slippery slope. Today you are asking about Superintendents or back office administration, but where do you draw the line. Once you go down this path – what other forced regionalization will be required in the future? Shared sports teams? Better to not start down this path at all.

I am also against HB #7150 The Governor's Teacher Pension push down proposal. In my mind, the teacher pension pushdown to the municipal level is linked to proposed regionalization. By regionalizing schools, I feel the State is trying to make it easier to push costs down to the municipal level.

The local communities do not negotiate the contracts for the pensions – the State does. Local communities only negotiate salaries and other benefits. How can the local communities be expected to pay for a contract when we don't even have a seat at the table that negotiates it? This is a form of taxation without representation.

You need to lift the cloud of any forced regionalization of any size district, student population or community population. It needs to be voluntary and use incentives only! We all know that bills can be amended. A bill about schools with less than 2000 students could be changed to less than 4000 students. Even the proposal of a study creates a cloud because the issue is not resolved and leaves the sword of Damocles still hanging over our heads.

The mere threat of regionalization has already had a direct impact. Our local paper published a letter from a California resident who had just sold a home and was planning on moving to Wilton, but was reconsidering when the school regionalization headlines hit. She is now considering Massachusetts.

In 2018 I served on a Board of Finance subcommittee to survey Wilton taxpayers about priorities. It was statistically valid. One of our findings was -The biggest factor attracting people to Wilton is our schools – at 81%.

Wilton also is updating it's, Plan of Conservation and Development. A recent statistically valid survey of residents about the POCD asked for ranking of the top priorities for Wilton. Number one was maintaining adequate funding for public school facilities and programs.

These bills of regionalization threaten our schools- We know the schools are the number one reason people move to Wilton and the number one priority of our residents.

Regionalization of schools is a threat to the very foundation of Wilton.

I am here to today to vehemently oppose any form of mandatory regionalization of schools and teacher pension pushdowns.

I not only ask – I beg you to oppose #738/454, SB #457, SB #874 and HB #7150.

Thank you.

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