

Dear Education Committee,

February 26, 2019

I am providing testimony today in strong opposition to Bills S.B. 738, S.B. 457, S.B. 874 and HB 7150. I am a registered Democrat and given these bills and several others that I will address in separate testimony, I do not support the Democratic legislative initiatives at this time. The bills referenced here will erode the autonomy of municipalities, divert local tax funds from municipalities to State coffers, and ultimately destroy the quality and identity of towns such as Wilton where I and my family reside. These bills all have language included for forced regionalization of public schools in Connecticut, diverting local tax funds to State coffers and/or penalizing school districts that want to maintain their autonomy. Our local school district, like many towns, is the cornerstone of our town's autonomy and success.

The proposed bills SB 874, SB 738, and SB 457 in the legislature will directly erode the autonomy of the town of Wilton and its successful school system which is the primary reason families move to Wilton. Many towns in Connecticut are attractive to families because of their strong schools and fiscal responsibility. These are towns that have little else in the way of amenities to offer residents because they have focused their resources on the education of their children. We moved to Wilton for the education it would provide our three children all of whom are either in college or have graduated with bachelor's degrees and are fully employed. Wilton, has worked hard to stay solvent and balance its budget year after year with minimal increase in taxes. Wilton has successfully investigated ways to voluntarily share resources with abutting small towns to reduce cost, made difficult choices regarding how to spend town funds for recreation, roads and schools, and managed its growth responsibly given the environmentally sensitive terrain and the needs of its citizens.

Our family has made many sacrifices to remain in Wilton. We have invested our time and energy for years supporting the community. It is an investment in the next generation. Recently Wilton's share of ECS grants were dramatically cut which has put an additional tax burden on the town. Those funds have already been given to districts with more challenging demographics. I have experience with several of the larger city school systems in Connecticut as a special education advocate. My experience is the size of the school greatly inhibits the success of the students. The administration has limited interaction with parents/teachers/staff. There is often significant mismanagement of resources. In fact special educational services in one district were so egregiously bad and mismanaged that a cohort of colleagues and I filed a systemic complaint with the state against the district. Studies show that large is not better. Educational outcomes are flat or decline and the cost savings are minimal or increase. Please refer to the studies below.

Massachusetts: <https://bit.ly/2SgVgVL>

Maine: <https://bit.ly/2T94Uyb>

Vermont: <https://bit.ly/2EphbGG>

National Education Policy Center [https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/PB-Consol-Howley-Johnson-Petrie.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2IE9JJaTVVWiQwg\\_DzY52H80olzKb7G4fmcmKGayorrT4hSv9oKuMKkCc](https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/PB-Consol-Howley-Johnson-Petrie.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2IE9JJaTVVWiQwg_DzY52H80olzKb7G4fmcmKGayorrT4hSv9oKuMKkCc)

In addition a study specific to Connecticut completed by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving concluded regionalization did not necessarily have positive outcomes This study found that "regionalization may lead to diseconomies of scale resulting from: higher transportation expenses

because of longer bus routes, overall increases (leveling up) in staff salaries because of seniority, and/or contract renegotiation, and increases in the number of mid-level administrators and administrative support staff". It also concluded that "the potential for educational achievement diminishes for at-risk students when they attend large schools that are disconnected from their community", that "in rural communities closing a town's school can cause the social fabric of a community to unravel", and that "impoverished regions often benefit from smaller school districts and they can suffer irreversible damage if consolidation occurs".

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving <http://ctbythenumbers.info/2018/07/09/k-12-school-district-regionalization-may-do-more-harm-than-good-analysis-finds/>

Bill HB 7150 would force municipalities to fund large portions of teachers' pensions. Given the current financial burden already placed on our town by the drastic reduction of funds for ECS grants and potentially diverting municipal car taxes to the State, it is irresponsible for the state to require local municipalities to fund a pension system that the State has failed to fully fund for fifty years.

The publicity surrounding these four bills has already negatively impacted the State. There is evidence that many people who were planning to move into Connecticut are reconsidering given the unknowns surrounding forced regionalization and diverting municipal tax revenue from towns to the State coffers.

Connecticut cannot afford to continue down this road. Connecticut legislators need to focus on attracting people to the State, not detracting. Connecticut legislators need to focus on eliminating the inefficiencies at the State level, fixing the union bargaining process, upgrading our infrastructure, streamlining the higher education pipeline from community colleges to state universities, and attracting more businesses to the area.

I ask that you oppose bills S.B. 738, S.B. 457, S.B. 874 and HB 7150 and any other legislation that diverts funds collected by local municipalities to the State and opens the door for forced regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Sincerely,  
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