

Bills 738, 457 and 874
Vicki and Michael O'Rourke
Darien, CT

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We are writing to oppose Bills 738, 457, and 874. The state should not force regionalization on any school district. The state should not involve itself in something that has always been, and should remain, a local matter. Connecticut's fiscal crisis, underperforming school districts and ever increasing school budgets do not have a one size fits all solution. Regionalization is not the answer.

Like most parents will tell you, our children are the most important thing in our life, and their education is of the utmost importance to us. We have put our trust for this most important task in the Darien School Board, a body of local men and women who are elected by, and accountable to, us, the residents of Darien. These elected officials live in our town and know what's best for educating the students of our town. They know the goals and priorities of Darien parents because they are our friends and neighbors. They have, or have had, children in the Darien schools. Each year, when it's time to pass the school budget, members of the Darien community engage in the process of public review and hearings. This process is best continued as a local process, one in which the School Superintendent and School Board are accountable to the residents of Darien.

We moved to Darien 8 years ago from Pennsylvania explicitly for the schools. We considered North Jersey, West Chester County, NY and Fairfield County, CT. We chose Darien for the culture and community of its schools. If you talk to most new residents in town, you will hear them give the same reason for choosing Darien. We have been exceedingly pleased with our children's education thus far. There is a reason for the old saying, "If it's not broke, don't fix it."

If certain school districts wish to voluntarily regionalize, then they are free to do so. Our lawmakers should find suitable ways to support them and provide them with the tools to successfully do so. For struggling school districts, our lawmakers should consider cooperative purchasing agreements or student based budget management. But for a district whose constituents wish to retain local control over their schools, the state should not interfere. The notion of forced regionalization is big government at its worst.

Furthermore, there is no empirical evidence that supports the notion that regionalization results in cost savings or improves the quality of education, particularly in moderately sized school districts such as Darien. Regionalized school districts will translate to diseconomies of scale, and higher administrative costs with more opportunities for budget dollars to be wasted and misused. Regionalized schools mean larger class sizes with lower teacher to student ratios, and lack of access and familiarity between students and teachers. Regionalized schools mean logistical problems and children riding on buses for an hour each way to get to and from school. Regionalized schools mean no school identity and a less personalized learning environment for our children.

As a resident of Darien, I especially urge the Senators and Representatives who represent Darien to heed the message being sent by their constituents. The message is loud and clear. We are not

interested in regionalization. We are not interested in a Commission, which completely lacks representation of affected parents, to study regionalization for the next 8 years. We are not interested in pursuing studies for evaluation or feasibility of regionalization. We want to retain control of our school district. Forced regionalization is not government working for its people. It is government working against them.

The question we want to ask is which Senator or Representative representing Darien will stand up and introduce a bill for a state law that prohibits forced regionalization unless a referendum of voters in the consolidating school district(s) have approved it? That is the person who has our vote now and in the future.