

February 14, 2019

Senator McCrory
Representative Sanchez
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
Hartford, CT 06106

Chairmen Senator McCrory & Representative Sanchez, Vice Chairs and Ranking members, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

I am writing to oppose **SB 738** (previously SB 454) as proposed by Senators Looney. There are a number of reasons why my family and I oppose this bill. Among them are the limited threshold necessary to require school districts to be regionalized, the increased costs to districts this can pose despite proposed savings, the impact it would have on the lives of children, the impact it would have on families, and the impact it would have on communities.

Senator Looney claims his proposal will lead to a "more efficient educational system." However, such intentionally vague language has been used in unfunded educational mandates previously in No Child Left Behind. These semantics are difficult to argue at face-value, however, looking closely, I am opposed to this bill. And it is not, simply, due to Senator Looney threatening state aid¹, and the spectre of fewer ECS dollars for towns, such as was felt in the budget crisis of 2017, when Governor Malloy cut state funding to fiscally responsible municipalities.²

The bill, as written, would require school districts with fewer than 40,000 residents to form new regional districts based on the current probate court districts. Of the 169 organized municipalities in Connecticut, just 24 met this threshold in 2018.³ Furthermore, those towns already in regional school districts are not distributed among probate court districts. Therefore, less than fifteen percent of Connecticut's towns would not be affected by this. Furthermore, there is little doubt that this would shift proportional and need-based ECS funding further towards urban areas, and away from suburban and rural Connecticut where more than half of the state's residents reside.

While Senator Looney touted cost savings through consolidation of high-salary administrators, there are hidden costs in this plan. First, and foremost, there would be bussing costs. Towns would be required to pay for increased fuel consumption on longer bus routes, bus driver wages would increase due to more time working, and bus companies would need to decrease the time between maintenance and replacement of vehicles as they would happen more often. These costs would be passed down to districts, and in turn, local tax-payers. Additionally, regionalization would mean in some part, new construction, and with it, added costs. Old buildings would need to be brought up to code, so that all schools in the new regional district would be on par. New schools would also need to be built. The costs of this construction would, undoubtedly, be passed on to the tax-payers. Finally, though there may be cost savings in buying bulk goods and services for larger schools, there would be immediate costs to upgrade technology, learning materials, and even school furniture, so that schools in the larger or newly formed regional districts would be on par with one another, and the other new regional districts formed.

The needs of children and families would also greatly be affected by such a drastic change, forcing six-tenths of the state's districts to consolidate. Regional districts would mean longer bus rides, at the very least for the middle and high school level students. My children already spend 50-60 minutes daily on the bus, and their commute is under two miles to the community elementary school, and only increases by a mile more as they advance to middle school, and the same again with high school. Longer bus rides would negatively impact the health of our youth. The sedentary lifestyle is a key factor in obesity rates in this country, and globally. Sitting in a car or bus,

¹ "Proposed Bill Calls for 'special Commission' to Consolidate Smaller Connecticut School Districts." FOX 61. January 30, 2019. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://fox61.com/2019/01/29/proposed-bill-calls-for-special-commission-to-consolidate-smaller-school-districts-across-the-state/>.

² Hladky, Gregory B. "Malloy School Aid Cuts Shock Local Officials." *The Hartford Courant*, August 21, 2017. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-town-bud-reax-20170818-story.html>.

³ "Connecticut Cities by Population." Connecticut Outline. Accessed February 14, 2019. https://www.connecticut-demographics.com/cities_by_population.

longer, has similar effects to sitting on a couch.⁴ Longer busrides would also mean students are waking earlier to catch busses. Due to increased electronic use, there is an epidemic of students not getting enough sleep. Further decreasing the amount of sleep students received would increase obesity numbers among the youth of this state, whom we must do our best to protect.⁵ Just last month, the state reported that nearly one-third of Connecticut's youth were overweight or obese.⁶ Increasing students' risk for obesity also increases their risk of future health issues such as diabetes and heart disease. Therefore, this plan is not favorable. Our students should be getting more sleep and being active after school. This will not happen with increased commutes on busses, or for our youngest, most inexperienced drivers. Assuming students get ten hours of sleep, as recommended, these children should not spend 1/7 of their waking hours each day commuting to school, half their day in school, and the remaining few hours preparing for school. They should have time to relax; our younger students should play, and families should be able to spend time together. Likewise, families would also suffer from this plan. When families choose their homes and communities, most do so in attempts to find the best combination of quality of life, education, home values versus the tax burden, all while having a reasonable commute to work. This plan would cause increased tax-payer burdens, as stated previously. Increased taxes at both the state and local level would only cause to drive citizens out of the state, creating a vicious cycle. Furthermore, there are other drawbacks to such a plan for families. Working parents would face increased costs regarding before and after-care, and possibly be forced to find new locations if their students' schools changed. Furthermore, most family's emergency contacts are local, and with regional school districts, students go to school further from home. This puts an unnecessary and undue burden on families. Finally, students, families, and schools would suffer, as there would be decreased parent participation. Community schools allow parents to drop-in for school-day performances and ceremonies, after-school games, and to attend school activities and PTA/PTO meetings. Regional school districts would put schools further from people's homes, meaning maintaining the same level of involvement would decrease the amount of time family units would be able to spend all together.

Communities would be hurt by this plan. Property values would change. There would be increased tax costs. Decades of traditions, school culture, and community-building and town pride would be eliminated through forced regionalization. There would be a loss of local control of education. As school districts are consolidated, who would decide which administration to keep? What would happen to these people? Inevitably, they would go back to classrooms, forcing out teachers, or take on roles within the new districts with smaller scopes, increasing micro-management. Which programs? These are community decisions that should be made at the community level. Forced regionalization would remove control from municipalities, and increase state oversight.

I leave you with a final thought. Recently, Wallingford brought up the question of simply consolidating their two high schools. The stakeholders responded overwhelmingly to keep two high schools. Their view on the matter was, "Big schools, big problems."⁷ Instead, the town chose, at a community level, to renovate current schools, and reinvest locally. Therefore, based on the information presented, I urge you to oppose **SB 738**, and I thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Christopher J. Pagliaro

1212 Side Hill Rd.
Cheshire, CT 06410

⁴ "Obesity and Sitting." Start Standing. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://www.startstanding.org/obesity/>.

⁵ "Sleep Deprivation and Obesity." The Nutrition Source. July 06, 2015. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/sleep/>.

⁶ *Connecticut Childhood Obesity Report, 2018 Estimates of Obesity and Its Risk Factors among Connecticut Youth*. Report. January 2019. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/dph/hems/nutrition/PDF/Childhood-Obesity-Report-2018-final.pdf?la=en>.

⁷ "Victory for Wallingford Teachers, Students, but Fight Continues Against Mega High School." CEA Stronger Together. Accessed February 15, 2019. <http://www.cea.org/issues/news/2018/dec/18/small-victory-for-wallingford-teachers-students-but-fight-continues-against-mega-high-school.cfm>.