

# WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Via email: [edtestimony@cga.ct.gov](mailto:edtestimony@cga.ct.gov)

Re: S.B. 738: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
S.B. 457: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SIZE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
S.B. 874: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CT

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

As Superintendent of Westport Public Schools, I appreciate the opportunity to express my opposition to S.B. 738, S.B. 457, and S.B. 874.

Twenty-five years ago our CT State Department of Education (CT SDE) was a beacon of innovation and advanced educational practices, a national model of excellence. While our CT SDE currently has a cadre of extremely dedicated and talented individuals, the gradual and continuous erosion of the resources allocated to this essential agency over the past two decades has greatly diminished the ability of this department to serve as a leader in education to the districts in our state. A quick review of the stellar state departments of education across our country demonstrates that they possess infrastructures of resources, professional development, and support for districts and educators at all levels. Our CT SDE has been reduced to primarily one of compliance, instead of cutting edge leadership in education. The lack of supportive resources at the state level for CT education has negatively impacted every district in CT. The strategy to starve our CT SDE has furthered burdened districts to create their own resources and supports, straining the economic resources of districts far more than those purported to be saved by forced regionalization of districts. Statewide supports and expertise for districts would greatly reduce many costs borne by districts at this time. Instead of thinking solely about the “regionalization” of groups of districts, if our state system were strong and robust, it would be both cost-effective for districts and positively impactful to provide resources to at-risk districts, helping to address the significant achievement gap in CT. The leveraging of these resources across 169 districts could be a powerful driver of success for students across the state and also be cost-effective to local districts.

While the goals of regionalization of districts are anticipated cost savings, the research on regionalization in other states indicates that forced regionalization often falls short of those savings, does not increase the quality of education, and creates a level of disruption that may actually negatively impact the quality of education. VT has been grappling with the reduction/consolidation of districts for some time now, and the latest report on their

efforts indicates that some 30 or so municipalities are still in litigation regarding the process and many communities have been negatively impacted by these efforts to regionalize.

Throughout our state, numerous districts demonstrate areas of excellence in education. From a national perspective, some of the most successful districts in our country are located in CT, attracting businesses and individuals to migrate to our state. In these times of economic challenge for the state, it would be detrimental to dismantle a great attractor to our state by undermining the effectiveness of our schools. **The level of disruption to our districts with forced regionalization would be the worst public relations move the state could make at this precarious time.** CT is already losing 55,000 residents a year – don't give another reason to someone to choose to live in another state.

With this said, there are efficiencies that can be gained with cooperative efforts of districts, and we encourage incentives for districts to move in that direction. Year over year, local municipalities have devoted the lion's share of their fiscal resources to the education of their children. It would be logical that municipalities would embrace these incentives and in a natural, productive manner design further collaborative efforts in a regional sense.

We encourage you to invest in education in meaningful ways to address our achievement gap and to allow the current successes of our state to continue to flourish. Your leadership at this juncture is critical to the future economic health and educational quality of our state. A short-term strategy of highly-disruptive forced regionalization is short-sighted and will create permanent harm to our state's educational system town-by-town.

Currently, Fairfield County towns compete with municipalities just over the New York line for residents who travel to New York City for work each day. The train ride from Westport was an hour in the past, but with the degradation of the rail system, most commuter trains now take an hour and 20 minutes, making Westport (and all neighboring CT communities) less desirable for these City workers. Don't give prospective new citizens one more reason to say "no" to CT.

Invest in the future of CT through strategic supports of our CT SDE and allow a new vision of education to emerge that embraces the success of every student. Incentivize our "Yankee spirit" to conserve educational reserves through aggressive efforts in collaboration. Inspire us to work with you to achieve the overall goals of CT and an equal opportunity for success of every student.

Sincerely,



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