

20 Birch Knoll Rd.
Canton, CT 06019
February 25, 2019

Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Re: Opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874

As parents of Canton public school students, we strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874 and any other bill opening the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

We moved to Canton 21 years ago and a main reason of that move was so our kids did not attend a regional school. We wanted to move to New Hartford but then learned they had a regional high school and we wanted no part in that. If we were forced to have our children lose the small town feel of our schools, we would not have purchased a home in Connecticut. According to the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, "by far the largest driver of Connecticut's declining population is an increase in the number of people leaving Connecticut for other states." The last thing we need to do for the Connecticut economy is give people incentive to leave the state or not move here from other states.

We understand there may be good intentions behind these bills with regards to the thought of possible cost savings. However, we believe our town does a better job controlling costs on our own. We are fortunate to be in financially sound district who shares costs with other towns for food services, co-op purchasing agreements (for fuel, printers, copiers, environmental testing services, etc) and shared transportation for special education out of district placements.

Our district is cost efficient.... out of 15 regional schools, our district's cost per student is lower than 12 of the 15. Our transportation costs would increase having to cover greater distances to transport students, not to mention increased time on the bus for students.

A new report from NBC News came out stating mental illness, namely anxiety and depression, is now a larger problem for teens than drug and alcohol abuse. So now you want to put these kids in a larger school environment with teachers, administrators and support staff who will not know them as well. What about the environment to which these kids have grown accustomed? What about the quality of the school? How will this affect them? Also, our children are good athletes; not outstanding. I am not sure they would make the cut on a high school team in a large school. However, being in a smaller school has allowed them to participate in soccer, indoor track, outdoor track and tennis. As a result, they became more confident in their abilities, improved as athletes, learned to be part of team, developed relationships with coaches and teammates. Thank goodness they benefited from being in a small school. Furthermore, the travel time would certainly increase for student athletes all over the state for away games. Has that been considered? My children don't play basketball but their friends do. We will be going to our schools basketball conference playoff game tonight to support our team. I'm not sure we could do that if we had to travel far. School takes a lot of time from families with all of the homework, sports, clubs, etc. We cherish the little time we have with our children during the

school year. Regionalizing schools will mean less time with our children, something lacking in our society already.

Regionalization also affects school spirit and town pride. Our little town has been recognized by the Grammys numerous times for our music program, we have won awards for sportsmanship and recognized by Newsweek for overall quality. Canton earned that, our teachers earned that, our administrators earned that, our BOE earned that and our children earned that. We are proud. If you regionalize, we lose that recognition and pride. These are the qualities that attract people to our town. This is part of why Yankee Magazine recognized our town. Our town and towns like it attract people to Connecticut. It is good for our state economy.

Canton Schools want to stay as Canton Schools, as I am sure many other small towns do as well with their own schools. We, the people voted for our local leaders and BOE members. If towns are not happy with the job their leaders are doing with their schools and finances, then they need to vote for new people and get involved in their town.

I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457, SB 874 and any other legislation leading to forced regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Respectfully,

Meredith Pickett