

Written testimony: SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874.

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874.

I write to oppose SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874, and any future bill proposing to implement, or study the implementation of, forced school regionalization. Before we even had children, my husband and I moved to Wilton in 2011 for its excellent public schools. Eight years later, we have three children and recently moved within Wilton. Although we had the choice to move to a different town and state, we decided to stay in Wilton primarily for its public schools.

The passage of these and similar bills would erode the quality and character of education for our children all for an unproven fiscal benefit to the State. Wilton's schools are relatively small with high administrator and community engagement. Combining Wilton with a larger school district would totally change this dynamic to the disadvantage of our children's education. I find it telling that none of these bills mention education quality because, clearly, they do not aim to maintain the quality of education in our towns and the State.

These bills have no regard for education quality and are only concerned about cost efficiency, however, there is no empirical evidence that regionalization actually saves states money. Research has shown that regionalization benefits are "vastly overestimated" (Howley, Craig, Jerry Johnson, and Jennifer Petrie. "Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What it Means." (2011).), any decrease in inefficiencies tends to be counterbalanced by new inefficiencies caused by regionalization, and financial benefits only exist when very small districts (less than 1,000 students) consolidate (Duncombe, William, and John Yinger. "Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?" Education Finance and Policy 2.4 (2007): 341-375).

Unlike the top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to regionalization contained in these bills, consolidation efforts made on a local level have proven to be effective at increasing cost efficiency. Wilton in particular has already been successful in sharing services with other towns because such decisions were made on a local level by those who know the community best. The state should incentivize cost inefficient towns to follow Wilton's lead in becoming more efficient, not punish towns like Wilton for already being fiscally responsible.

Real estate markets in my town and similar towns are already being affected while these bills are being considered. People are refraining from moving into town and others are considering leaving it and the State because the quality of our education system is in limbo. The drop in the housing market could realistically lead to a foreclosure crisis akin to 2008 and financial disaster for Connecticut. Risking further economic decline of Wilton and Connecticut for the unproven financial benefit of regionalization makes absolutely no sense.

Please consider these risks and oppose SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874 and any other legislation that opens the door to forced or coerced regionalization of our schools. As our elected officials, we hope you can

find ways to make the State more efficient without hurting our children's education and causing significant economic harm to Connecticut.

Thank you again for hearing my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sarah Sunhee Rhee

Wilton, CT