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February 28, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Education Committee- *EDTestimony@cga.ct.gov*

Rep. Gail Lavielle- *Gail.Lavielle@cga.ct.gov*

Re: Education/School Regionalization Proposals

File To: SB454; SB457; SB738; SB874; and HB7150

Dear Elected Officials:

Please docket this letter as strong opposition to the passage of the above-referenced bills. Additionally, I urge all members of our State government to take note of the sheer number of bills proposed-- some allegedly requiring amendments before hearings have even been held due to typographical errors. It is evident from this method of inundating citizens and elected officials with proposals that those sponsoring the bills hope they will get passed with some having not read them, and others having no time to conduct proper due diligence. I know that my Representative, Gail Lavielle, will make the time necessary, and trust that other will too. To those elected officials who feel overwhelmed, I urge you to do the same irrespective of who or which party proposed a bill, or how many are being foisted upon you.

The proposals to consolidate, regionalize, or study either of those concepts is fundamentally flawed. It presupposes that the education system as run by the local municipalities does not work. It presupposes that the State, which has failed to adequately plan its own finances, is better able to determine how a local municipality should run its financial house. It presupposes that all people want the same styles and options for their child's education. It fundamentally changes a major consideration upon which people selected their residence. Ask any real estate agent, purchasing home is about location, location, location.

Locations are chosen for their features, and a municipality's education system is a major positive feature in Connecticut. In connection with Wilton's Plan of Conservation and Development ("POCD") process, the Center for Research & Public Policy ("CRPP") conducted a survey of residents in December 2018. According to the report, "[t]he leading reason cited for choosing Wilton as home or continuing to live in Wilton was the community education system" in town.¹

As a parent, I spend a significant amount of my free time working with the PTA and in support of our teachers. We have direct control of our school budgets, and have already needed to adjust due to the State's reduction in our municipal aid and ECS funding. Determinations as to what is best for a child should be a value judgment left to parents. The management of local schools is no place for the State to intervene.

I note that there is no consideration in any of these bills as to whether forced merger of districts will benefit the children or improve the quality of education. In fact, elements of one bill seems to address consolidation of unions and renegotiation of collective bargaining agreements ("CBA"s). Our elected officials need to either honor existing contracts or negotiate in good faith. Putting our children's education at risk in an attempt to bust unions or renegotiate CBAs without actually taking a position is nothing more than playing politics with our children.

The same is true for the proposal to make local municipalities who have budgeted appropriately take responsibility for all or any part of the State's pension obligation. Local

¹ Wilton POCD Survey Results, *available at*: https://wilton2029.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/telephone_survey_results.pdf, *last accessed February 27, 2019*.

municipalities reasonably relied upon the State's commitment to manage its funds and the State should find alternative means to meet its now past due obligation.

Connecticut is ranked fourth in people leaving the state. At a time when people are fleeing the State of Connecticut, our elected officials should be focused on drafting and passing legislation that promotes residency in its towns, cities, and the State as a whole, not legislation acts to drive residents from the State.²

Legislation removing local control of something as personal and important as education would result in people moving to locations where they have a say in their children's education. Wilton and most towns in Connecticut have wonderful education systems that operate based upon local concerns and with significant input from parents. We should respect and promote such community involvement, rather than stifle it and send parents to search for homes in neighboring states.

I ask that you vote with a resounding "NO!" on SB454; SB457; SB738; SB874; and HB7150, and any other bill attempting to centralize, regionalize, study or otherwise consolidate school districts, and any bill passing State pension obligations to local municipalities.

Sincerely,

Melissa-Jean Rotini

Melissa-Jean Rotini, Esq.

² The Hartford Courant, [Surprise! People are Leaving Connecticut](http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-people-leaving-connecticut-20180103-story.html), January 3, 2108, *available at:* <http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-people-leaving-connecticut-20180103-story.html>, last accessed February 28, 2019.

cc:

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Submission of Melissa-Jean Rotini

Regarding Education/School Regionalization Proposals

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