

Written Testimony on SB 738, 457 and 874

February 26, 2019

To all members of the Education Committee:

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony on SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874. I am a parent of public school students and strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874, and any other bill that would open up the possibility of forced regionalization or consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

I am from Baton Rouge, Louisiana where I attended and graduated from public schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, which has current student enrollment of nearly 42,000 and is spread across a parish comprised of several towns. I wanted something different for my children, including very local control of education.

We lived in Glen Ridge, NJ for eight years, and specifically chose that town for its educational strength compared to others in that part of the state. When we relocated to Connecticut in 2014, school district performance was a primary driver in our decision to live in Wilton, CT. We continue to be very happy with our schools here in Wilton, and enjoy the direct impact we have as voters on our municipal and school budgets. We also love the close knit, small town feel of the schools and enjoy building relationships with our teachers, staff and administrators.

Our schools are doing very well, and I am concerned that any forced regionalization or consolidation will negatively impact student outcomes. I have not seen language in any of these bills that discusses student performance or outcomes, and any educational policy must address school quality or it should not be considered.

As someone who attended large schools, with large class sizes, I am concerned these bills have the potential to negatively impact student learning. I also believe parent and community engagement decreases in a larger environment, thereby negatively impacting student outcomes.

Wilton has already made strides in looking for innovative ways to control costs by sharing services where possible. Just one example of this includes both a joint CFO and a joint Facilities Director being shared by the town and school district. Wilton is already working to save costs where possible, and our town is best equipped to understand where it makes sense to share services, particularly as our town meeting form of government makes our Board of Selectmen and Board of Education directly accountable to the townspeople, who are of course the taxpayers.

Another concern is the message being sent by these proposed bills to people contemplating a move into Connecticut. Our local news recently ran a letter from a family in California who has been looking to move to Wilton, and in fact, sold their California house just as these bills were announced. They aren't sure what they will do, but are now thinking they will move to Massachusetts instead of Connecticut. Here is a link to their letter:

<https://goodmorningwilton.com/letter-from-calif-with-school-consolidation-threat-we-may-move-to-ma-ss-over-ct/>

These bills create uncertainty in our state at a time when we should be looking to create stability, which could foster both a stronger business environment and population growth, ultimately improving our tax base. I fear passage of any of these bills will encourage people with the ability to leave our state to do just that, negatively impacting our state economy. We are already losing population here, and it seems that any legislation should be looking to reverse that trend, not provide additional reasons to either leave or stay away.

I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457, SB 874, and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization or consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you for reading my testimony, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Laura Rowley
45 Woods End Dr.
Wilton, CT 06897