



**WILTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
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**Testimony of Kevin J. Smith, Ph.D.**  
**Superintendent of Schools / Wilton Public Schools**  
***In opposition to***

- **SB 738 – An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts**
- **SB 457 – An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts**
- **Governor’s Bill 874 – An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut**
- **Governor’s Bill 7150 – An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations Concerning Education**

**Education Committee – Public Hearing**  
**March 1, 2019**

Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez and members of the Education Committee:

Please accept this testimony in opposition to bills 738, 457, 874 and 7150.

I am vehemently opposed to any bill, or any provision in any bill mandating forced regionalization. The Wilton Public Schools are the pride of the community and have a long and rich history of delivering a world class education at an affordable price. The residents of Wilton have invested significantly in their schools and consequently enjoy not only a very high graduation rate, but also a very high college completion rate. In 2018, 98% of the senior class graduated, and of that number nearly 65% were accepted to colleges and universities considered by Barrons as either *Highly Selective* or *Most Selective*. According to the most recent data from the National Clearing House, 84% of the class of 2012 that went on to college graduated within 6 years (compare that to a national average of 59%) – and the overwhelming majority of that number in four to five years. These indicators are simple yet powerful examples of the high quality of the Wilton Schools.

I offer those data points in question to the rationale for regionalization. The locally managed Wilton Schools serve our families exceptionally well. Nowhere in any of the proposed legislation is a suggestion that regionalization will improve educational outcomes for students. Indeed, there is no suggestion because there is no evidence to support such a claim. If the argument is not to improve schools but to save money, I suggest to you that empirical evidence in support of that claim is specious at best. In a 2011, National Education Policy Center brief, the authors argue, “Research on the effects of contemporary consolidation suggests that new

consolidation is likely to result in neither greater efficiency nor better instructional outcomes—especially when it results from state policy that implements large-scale forced consolidation.”

I noted in Governor’s bill 874 a provision that gives the commissioner of education the ability to deduct from state aid the amount of a superintendent’s salary in municipalities that have 1-2 elementary schools and decline to utilize a superintendent from another district. Because of that, I reject the governor’s suggestion that his regionalization proposals are about carrots and not sticks. Years ago, wisely, Wilton built its school system to maximize efficiency. In 2010, Wilton actually combined its two primary schools into one. And though we have only 2 elementary schools, each house nearly 900 students; They are among the largest in the state. This structure enables us to economize administrative costs and provides tremendous benefits in terms of curriculum alignment and professional teacher support. The design of our district enables us to run some of the administratively leanest schools in our District Reference Group. The net impact of this provision in the Governor’s bill is to punish Wilton for having the foresight to build structures that maximize efficient operations.

We in Wilton understand the value of shared services. Since I have been superintendent, and Lynne Vanderslice has been First Selectwoman, we have worked cooperatively to establish shared service arrangements in our finance and facilities departments. The town and schools share a health insurance plan, and partake in cooperative purchasing arrangements. Later this year we will be consolidating our finance and payroll software and operating under a single EIN. That shift alone is going to save Wilton taxpayers thousands of dollars. While we share the desire to maximize the efficiency of our system, we reject a “one-size-fits-all” state mandate.

Concurrently, the education committee is entertaining legislation that would require municipalities to pay a portion of teacher pension benefits. This proposal should also be rejected. Municipalities had no control over decisions to design or fund the teacher pension plan. The decision to defer investment annually for years was not a local municipal decision. In fact, Wilton fully funds its annual required contributions for its own pension obligations. I urge the committee to reject Governor’s Bill 7150.

We share the legislature’s desire to reduce costs and maximize efficient school operations. The net impact of these bills if adopted will be a degraded school system that costs local taxpayers much more. I respectfully request that the education committee reject SB 738, SB 457 and Governor’s Bills 874 and 7150. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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