

The Soudagar Family  
221 Whipstick Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

February 25, 2019

Senator Martin Looney  
Senator Bob Duff  
Senator Will Haskell  
Senator Eric Berthel

Representative Gail Lavielle  
Representative Tom O'Dea  
Representative Robert Sanchez  
Representative Kathleen McCarty

Education Committee

**Re: Bills SB 738 / SB 457 / SB 874**

Dear Senators, Representatives and Education Committee:

I never would have imagined having to write a letter like this and am shocked that these bills under consideration (SB 738 / SB 457 / SB 874) have even made it to the collective bargaining table. There is no doubt in my mind that district consolidation will create the kind of negative impact on families and children in this state that no amount of fiscal benefit would even come close to justifying.

In this current climate of real threats coming from all angles – Washington to school hallways – so many of us have found comfort in the amenities and fellowship of small towns. The heart of these towns is the schools. Perhaps my own personal view is too idyllic (or, at worst, naïve or privileged) for Hartford, but my husband and I moved to Wilton, after spending 10 years in Norwalk, primarily for what we knew the local schools would offer. Despite predictable flaws here and there, we have never once questioned the quality of education, the dedication of teachers and staff and the safety and well-being of our children once they walk through school doors. It goes without saying that our confidences will crumble if regionalization becomes our new reality.

Despite understanding that there is no real evidence that regionalization will fix whatever mess it intends to and that property values around the state will surely suffer, I'll let the letters and voices of my neighbors and friends speak to the fiscal consequences of these proposals. My objective is to focus on the experience of my children. Merging districts with completely different demographics and attitudes is beyond irresponsible. The quality

of education – and the lives we are building in these small towns! – will be compromised in ways beyond measure. Small town schools in this state are unique, precious and deserving of your protection. It is the state's negligence that brought us to this crossroads and the state's responsibility to correct it responsibly and mindfully.

As a side note, my family has lived in Wilton since the early 70's. My mother taught in the Wilton school system and always prioritized children and education as she changed gears and took on leadership roles in the League of Women Voters, our local Historical Society and Girls Scouts. My sister and I attended Wilton schools and words cannot express the feeling I get every time I drop my own daughters off at Miller-Driscoll. My career path recently brought me right into the center of town and I have never felt so connected to my children, their school and the community. I'm writing this letter because I feel strongly about preserving something that seems to have fallen into a political blind spot – people (especially young families!) not only wanting to live in Connecticut's small towns, but also having a reason to stay ~ possibly for generations.

I do wonder who is reading these stacks of letters, but I hope that at least one of you reads this one in particular and takes it to heart.

All the Best,

*Jennifer*

Jennifer Tesar Soudagar