

State of Connecticut Education Committee
Opposed: Bills 738 and 457
February 28, 2019

Good afternoon Chairmen Sanchez, McCrory and Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel:

I write today on behalf of the Town of Darien students, families, taxpayers and join my colleagues on the Darien Board of Education and Council of Darien School Parents in expressing my strong objection to **Bill 738: An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts, Bill 457: An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts** and other legislation that will mandate forced school service consolidation. It is unclear that this time if or in what form or substance the concept of school 'regionalization' or 'consolidation' will be codified in legislation and this fact alone is perpetuating taxpayer uncertainty and having a negative effect on the real estate markets, particularly in Southwestern Connecticut.

Connecticut's fiscal challenges are great. We are grateful for your service in addressing these challenges for the long-term benefit of our state. Respectfully, I would argue that measures to mandate school consolidations runs counter to why families choose Connecticut to raise their families...high quality public education for all students. Investments in Connecticut's public and choice schools are a critical economic development initiative. These bills send the wrong message to families and businesses considering Connecticut and are counter-intuitive to the growth in school enrollment that economic prosperity will undoubtedly bring.

The goal of maximizing student educational outcomes for all learners and providing government services in the most cost efficient manner is the highest priority for Darien town leaders. We have purposefully crafted a path to fiscal self-sufficiency as the loss of statutory grant funding became evident. The combined impacts of school regionalization with the loss of statutory grant funding, sharing in the costs of state-managed teacher pensions, proposed state-wide real property and motor vehicle taxes, changes in sales tax policy and highway tolling are eroding taxpayer and family confidence. Punishing towns with forced regionalization that are significant contributors to Connecticut's tax base and receive little to no state support undermines the important partnership between state and local government.

I specifically object to Bills 738 and 457 because they have been introduced with no supporting data or quantifiable evidence showing impacts, positive or negative, to student outcomes. Furthermore, there is no credible data to evidence the cost savings or process efficiencies consolidations are reported to facilitate. Without concrete data, one is left to wonder if there are other intended objectives to regionalizing public school services that are not related to better student outcomes or cost savings. I strongly support measures to improve educational outcomes for students in underperforming urban districts but not at the cost of outcomes for all other students.

We have great hope for Governor Lamont's ability to work with the legislature to forge fiscal policies that will stabilize and grow our Connecticut economy. Removing barriers to intra- and inter-municipal service sharing are welcomed. Breaking down silos between towns and Boards of Education to facilitate service sharing would be a very good first step.

I respectfully ask that the Education Committee table Bills 738 and 457 and include parents, local leaders and Boards of Education in robust analysis of the intended and unintended impacts of mandated school regionalization. Local leaders welcome seats on the proposed Commission on Shared Services and the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations so that we can work together for the benefit of our students, families, businesses and taxpayers.

Regards,
Jayme Stevenson



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