

To: edtestimony@cga.ct.gov

February 28, 2019

Members of the Education Committee

Subject: Opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874

I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that may force regionalization of Connecticut public schools or penalizes schools who chose not to regionalize. I request that you reject all three bills and refuse to move forward any new or revised bill that proposes formation of a commission to study possible regionalization or consolidation of public school districts.

I graduated from Wilton High School in 1983 and returned to my home town in 1990 to raise my family because of our excellent school system and wonderful community. I am also the proud parent of a 2018 Wilton High School graduate who excelled in the small classes with top-notch educators that Wilton is known for. The statewide opposition among both Connecticut's residents and public school parents to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 is justified for so many reasons. Specifically, the proposed bills; (1) will not improve our children's education and will likely negatively impact learning, (2) will not save local taxpayers any money, (3) will harm our communities, (4) will hurt at-risk and/or disadvantaged students, and (5) will undermine the voices of residents, parents and teachers within our local schools.

(1) SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 DO NOT improve our children's education

There is not a single reference in any of these bills to improving education in Connecticut. Studies have proven that the best overall academic achievements are in elementary schools with fewer than 500 students and high schools with fewer than 1,000 students. Regionalization leads to longer commutes, less parent volunteering, and less extracurricular participation. Regionalized schools have more truancy and more dropouts. There is no evidence that these bills will improve the quality of education in Wilton or any other town.

(2) SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 DO NOT save taxpayers money

The most cost-effective districts have fewer than 5,000 students. Many of Connecticut's large districts such as Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford have above average costs, while many of our small districts have average or below average costs. Trivial cost reductions from regionalization would come from per-pupil savings in the smallest districts. However, that represents such a small fraction of the state's education spending that the benefits would be offset elsewhere. Efficiency can be interpreted in many ways but one thing is for certain: the budget impact this will have on Wilton and our property taxes will require dramatic measures similar to what the state has just handed down to us. This will force unnecessary belt tightening and cuts to vital town programs.

(3) SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 hurt our communities

These bills damage property values in towns with regionalized schools. That, in turn, harms our tax bases and makes it harder to attract new taxpayers and businesses. Furthermore, the positive dynamic of a single town school system is forever changed when students no longer

share the same community feeling. We are already seeing the negative impacts from just the discussion of school regionalization throughout Connecticut's towns as people like me question why we should stay here when these proposed bills go against everything we value most in our schools and communities.

(4) SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 hurt at-risk and disadvantaged students the most

Again, studies have proven that at-risk students do better in smaller school districts. I also know this from first-hand experience. Regionalization results in an environment where these students are less likely to thrive. Larger districts are less connected with their local communities. Teachers are less involved and there is less personal attention provided to the kids who need it most. It is that teacher involvement that can make the difference between success and failure for at-risk or disadvantaged students.

(5) SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 undermines the voices of residents, parents and teachers

The vast majority of Connecticut residents, parents with school children and teachers are against these bills. Listen to us. Do as we ask and reject these bills and any other possible bill that forms a commission to study regionalization or consolidation of public school districts. I join my fellow residents of Wilton and surrounding communities to say "**Hands Off Our Schools**" as part of a united front to protect our local schools from the threats of SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874. I want what is best for our kids, not what some politicians think is best. Government needs to stay out of what has worked in our local school districts.

My husband and I chose to live in Wilton for the past 29 years, and we want to stay because every resident here benefits from the high quality of Wilton public schools and tight knit community. These bills would eliminate our primary reason for retiring here and would strongly encourage us to leave Connecticut. I know my fellow empty nesters feel the same. As my elected representatives, I strongly urge you to oppose SB 738, SB 457, SB 874, and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization or financially penalizes towns that do not regionalize because this fundamentally threatens our community.

Diane L. Wilson
37 Ridge Lane
Wilton, CT 06897