

Dear Senators and Members of the Education Committee,

2/25/19

As a parent of the Wilton Public School, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

Many of the letters and testimony you will read and hear will cover many of the same points. Families choose a community to live in based on safety and the quality of the schools. You will hear about declining property values and how there is little research to support any cost savings with the plans that have been put forward. My focus has more to do with choice and how personal experience has led me and my family to where we are today.

I was born in Norwalk and graduated from Brien McMahon High School in 1995. For eighteen years I called this community my home and to this day am truly grateful for the exposure to diversity that I was able to receive. Norwalk has a rich variety of cultures that make up its population and to this day I so appreciate this part of my childhood and adolescence. However, during my time at Norwalk Public Schools (NPS), I can't say that I truly reached my potential. During my elementary years the staff failed to recognize that I had a learning disability. This has impacted me my entire life.

In the fourth grade, when I did excellent in one of the state math tests the school put me and a few other high performers in an independent math class that was not properly facilitated by the teacher. I was not taught the many math levels I was allowed to pass as a result of the class structure. When I arrived to middle school, the staff realized that I had not been properly taught so they bumped me from the highest track to the lowest. Not only did this destroy my self-esteem, no one ever properly taught me the necessary math skills I needed. As a result, I struggled all through middle school, into high school and experienced both financial impact due to having to take remedial classes and a continued decline in my self - esteem.

In my professional life I became an educator. My graduate work includes a degree in special education. In my first years of teaching I had my second interactions with NPS. As a preschool teacher I was part of the first line of defense when it came to identifying children

with special needs. Every time I had a student from NPS the process from referral, evaluation and eligibility was always a colossal uphill battle. Only a handful of the families that I worked with that needed services were able to secure them. I consistently witnessed many children turned away and families left to manage with no the means to do so. I would often advise parents to move to another district in order to get better services.

One of my several career moves lead me to my final interaction with NPS. I spent almost two years working with the Instructional Specialist of Early Education in support of the School Readiness grant from the Office of Early Childhood. What I witnessed in my time at Norwalk City Hall was an administration that was incapable of properly leveraging their resources and talented to staff to meet the needs of their students. Politics and a culture of toxicity and dysfunction was what I witnessed far to often. By this point in my life I had interacted with NPS as a student, professional and employee. It was at this time that I decided my children would never attend NPS.

My husband and I sacrificed for years so that we could afford enough money to own a home in Wilton where we knew the schools were performing at much higher levels. At three my son was diagnosed with a disability and I was thankful for the sacrifice that we had endured because my son's disabilities are considered invisible and he would not be receiving services if we were still living in Norwalk.

Any and all proposals on the table to force any type of regionalization takes away from us the choices we made about how we wanted our son's educational experience to evolve. You don't have to search for long to find all the recent news in the Norwalk Hour that explains how NPS have failed to provide the appropriate services for children with IEP's. I have friends who live and work in the district with children with special needs and the stories they tell coincide with the absolutely despicable behavior of those in Special Services as depicted in the news. We don't need less administrators in districts like Wilton, Norwalk, Westport, New Canaan, and so on. We need more! Our children's needs are not being fully met. IDEA is not even properly federally funded and you want to take staff away. This is a blatant disregard for what a free and appropriate education is supposed to be.

I understand the need to make difficult choices and look for ways to balance the budget but never on the backs of children. Taking a hard look at where inefficiencies exists

and working with school districts to find ways to combine resources is absolutely something that should be explored. This broad-brush stroke of regionalization for all is not what is going to lead to and uphold a free and appropriate education. Local districts have been carving out their way of life and working to meet the needs of its children for decades. To simply come and pull that away from a community is extremely disruptive. You will drive our family and many others out of Connecticut. I am only staying here for the education. If that goes away then it provides me no legitimate reason to stay. I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457, SB 874, and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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