

February 28, 2019

Dear Education Committee:

I am writing to oppose Senate Bills 454/738/874 that have all been recently introduced in the state legislature. **I strongly oppose school regionalization.** It will change the face of our special communities in Connecticut for the worse and send the tax payers who butter the bread in Connecticut away to other states. We were deciding between NY and CT states when we were moving from the city over 15 years ago to raise our three children - who are now 15, 13 and 10 and all attending Wilton Public Schools. We wanted high quality schools and a smaller community where parents are highly involved in shaping the education system for their children. Given the choice - had there been even a threat of regionalization or the schools were of lesser quality - we would have chosen NY state over CT. We moved to Wilton because of the long history of providing the highest quality of education here. We paid higher prices and more taxes to live in this particular CT town - and we have been happy to do that - because we value and prioritize quality education, community, excellent teachers, and proven academic success. Wilton is an example for any surrounding town experiencing lower quality education and demanding higher cost to our government. Wilton uses less aid and should not be penalized for fiscal responsibility and quality education but should instead be held up as inspiration and motivation.

As a member of the democratic party myself and while I absolutely value diversity and equal education for all children in our country, I do not think the idea of forced regionalization in CT will get us there. Studies have been done - further studies on this subject would be a waste of time and resources and in the meantime your constituents who came here for the schools and who brought their businesses here - will be leaving the state to find smaller high quality schools. Even the press and buzz around this idea is doing damage **right now**. I was a K-12 student in the Seattle public schools and I worked with 100 NYC schools as an educational non-profit director and educational psychologist. I know how these bigger school districts work and look from the inside out - and I can tell you this is not an idea that will serve the children or educators in our smaller Connecticut communities. This is a flawed and harmful idea for our schools and consideration of forced regionalization must come to an end.

The assumption behind these bills is that through regional consolidation, districts and municipalities will improve economies of scale and therefore find financial savings. According to our school superintendent and supported by most members of this community, including myself and my family — **"This assumption is incorrect and flawed, and if this legislation is enacted, Connecticut students will suffer irreparable harm"**. I am deeply concerned about this proposed bill and want to put a stop to it long before damage can be done. **Forced regionalization would harm school size and quality and it does not ultimately save money.**

Kevin Smith states " Several recent studies on regional school and district consolidation suggest there is no empirical evidence to validate that such a move actually leads to cost savings. In fact, a 2011 National Education Policy Center study claims that benefits from school district consolidation are "vastly overestimated." A 2007 article in *Education Finance and Policy* suggested that district consolidation may actually create negative impacts such as higher transportation costs, a "leveling up" of salaries, and more negative attitudes among staff members and parents. The same study suggests that financial benefits may be found only when

consolidation of very small districts (fewer than 300 to 1000 students) occurs.” Combining resources, retro-fitting schools, and sorting through legal issues will offset any perceived savings. Larger school districts need to hire more costly administrators and staff members not fewer. In addition, according to a 2010 UConn study “there is no link between efficiency and academic performance”.

Wilton is annually recognized among the top 1% of all school districts in the nation. We feel that if any conversation about regionalization is going to occur, the first consideration must be QUALITY of education, **not** the cost of education. To ignore the potential dangers of regionalization is short sighted and will most certainly trigger a host of unintended negative consequences. Aside from drawing fewer new residents to our unique area - we face lower quality education.

** **Smaller districts attract better teachers and administrators who - like my family - value personal connections and parent and community involvement found in smaller towns and districts like Wilton.***

** **There is no evidence that larger schools are better than smaller ones.***

** **When schools get bigger - parent and community engagement declines.***

** **Consolidating our schools likely will mean longer bus rides, higher absenteeism, and lower achievement scores.***

Kevin Smith has shared the recommendation that "the legislature consider opportunities for the state to maximize its purchasing power on behalf of school districts. One simple example would be for the State Department of Education to purchase a contract with a single student database provider, and centralize and automate annual district reporting to the state. Recent estimates suggested that more than 60% of districts utilize the same student database provider but purchase individual contracts. If the State Department of Education took over this function, districts could realize both a lower fee for the service and lower personnel costs associated with local student database management and report preparation". My family supports this recommendation and **we strongly oppose Bill 454/738/874 along with many members of our community. Please consider our opposition and concern and please oppose SB 454/738/874 and any other effort to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools.**

Thank you!

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