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To: Connecticut State Legislators regarding my concern over Proposed Bills 454, 457, 738 and 874

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am an eight-year resident of Wilton, CT and I am writing to express my opposition to PSB's 454/738 and concern over bills 457 and 874.

My wife and I moved to Wilton, CT in 2011 for one primary reason: The School System. We moved from Norwalk to Wilton for its top ranked school system and small-town feel. Wilton has higher housing costs than Norwalk, but we wanted to relocate to a town with high performing and stable schools. Living in Wilton we now have four children six and under, one in Kindergarten in Wilton, and another starting next year. We know many families like ours who have moved to Wilton from other CT towns or from out of state, specifically for Wilton's school system. Recent town surveys back this up: *"The leading reason cited for choosing Wilton as home or continuing to live in Wilton was the community education system (43.1%)."* 1. *"Perceived value/quality of the schools was cited as the number one reason people came to Wilton in the last year."* 2.

I do not support any proposed legislation concerning forced School Regionalization such as 454/738. These proposed bills state that their purpose is "To create a more efficient educational system." There does not seem to be any data/analysis that supports Such an objective currently. I took a close look at these proposals using two major criteria: 1. Quality of Education 2. Efficiency/Cost Reductions.

Criteria #1 Quality of Education: 454/738 mention nothing about maintaining or elevating the quality of our children's education. Wilton is a top ten performing school system in the state according to various sources. 3 All of the other top performing districts in Fairfield County: New Canaan, Westport, Greenwich, Darien and Ridgefield, Weston, etc. are all top ranked districts in CT and all have less than 10,000 students. Other studies have found that the optimal School district size for CT would be between 2500 and 3000. 4 Forcing School districts like Wilton to join larger districts from other towns would certainly have an impact on the quality and effectiveness of all the districts involved. Possible negative impacts I see are: decreased Spending per student, higher teacher student ratios, longer bus routes, increased bureaucracy and budget battles, decreased funding for school facilities, extracurricular activities and special education.

**But most importantly, we don't know what the specific impacts would be on the Quality of Education as it has not been studied.**

Criteria #2 Increased Efficiency/Cost Reductions: In the research I conducted there was limited analysis of what efficiencies would be achieved. *“Economic efficiency is expected when small school districts consolidate, and in peer states the optimal school district size for these efficiencies is approximately 1,500-3,000 students.”* 5 Therefore, the criteria of making School Districts have 40,000 or more residents is not backed up by data and seems like a guesstimate.

Regardless of what the intent is of these bills, I think we are ignoring the potential impacts without enough study. Connecticut's population is in decline, businesses large and small are leaving the state. I would think these potential side-effects should be on the top of your mind when considering major changes to our education system. School District Regionalization could remove a major reason as to why young people and families are still moving to or staying in Connecticut.

In conclusion, I am all for progress and positive change in our state, but PSB 454/738 are short-sided and lack enough evidence. Bills 457 and 874 should assess/research/study what cost reductions can be achieved by creating additional consolidation of shared services or administrative functions across school districts and regions and then positively incentivize change where it would be impactful. **However, we must mandate that the Quality of Education for our children must be consistent and hopefully improved.** If we rush to act without fully knowing what the impacts would be, we risk the creation of further inequality, school decline and further emigration from our great state.

Thank you for your time,

Brit Bischoff

Sources:

1. [https://wilton2029.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/telephone\\_survey\\_results.pdf](https://wilton2029.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/telephone_survey_results.pdf)
2. <http://wiltonedc.org/WP2/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/WEDC-AnalyticStudy-Part1.pdf>
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<https://www.schooldigger.com/go/CT/districtrank.aspx>
4. <https://www.niche.com/k12/search/best-school-districts/s/connecticut/>[http://www.hfpg.org/files/1815/2595/9230/Hartford\\_Foundation\\_K-12\\_Regionlization\\_Report\\_05-08-18.pdf](http://www.hfpg.org/files/1815/2595/9230/Hartford_Foundation_K-12_Regionlization_Report_05-08-18.pdf)
5. <http://ctschoolfinance.org/assets/uploads/files/School-District-Consolidation.pdf>