

School Regionalization Bill Numbers SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874

Chairman McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 457, SB 738, and SB 874

As a longtime resident of Connecticut, and a parent of public school students, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced or incentivized regionalization of Connecticut public schools. Additionally, I am unequivocally opposed to establishing a study or pilot program on this topic.

I grew up in Danbury, CT, where I attended public schools, and eventually graduated from Danbury High. I left Connecticut to attend college and then moved to New York City for my career. My reason for moving back to Connecticut was for my children to attend the high quality local public school system. My husband and I took our time and considered communities across the NY metropolitan area, including Westchester, Long Island and Fairfield County. Needless to say, it's the existing public school system that keeps us here in New Canaan, and we are very concerned that legislators are looking to change the local success of our district and force school regionalization.

What are the desired outcomes of forcing regionalization? If the State of CT is looking for cost savings, then legislators should instead be focused on other areas to save money, such as regionalized tax collecting, permitting, 911 calls, or waste management. Schools are for educating our precious children and we should instead be focused on ensuring strong student performance and successful outcomes across the state. As an alternative, Hartford should be studying what makes Westport, New Canaan, Wilton, Darien, etc. top ranking public school districts.

Additionally, regionalization studies have been conducted before, and do not show the cost savings anticipated: "In rural communities, closing a town's school can cause the social fabric of a community to unravel" – please refer to the recent report by the Hartford Foundation and available at www.hfpg.org.

A forced mandate would also not allow the local towns to find solutions that work for their individual needs, and the smaller towns would ultimately lose control to the larger school districts. This has been shown in other states that have gone down this path. Some states, like Maine and Vermont, are even trying to reverse regionalization given its abysmal results on cost savings, student outcomes, etc.

Should SB 874 get passed (which I hope it does not), the Governor proposes a Commission on Shared School Services which will consist of members appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders. The Governor should instead include appropriate individuals from the top 5 school districts in CT – a group whose representation is missing in this exercise -- to provide examples of what works well and how these towns have maximized such strong student performance and outcomes.

I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874 and any other legislation that opens the door to forced or incentivized regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you again for allowing my testimony.

Best regards,

Lisa Carpenter
New Canaan, CT