

February 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Education Committee

First, let me thank you for taking the time to review this letter. My name is Michele Cronin. I grew up in Greenwich and went through the public school system there. I continue to have strong ties to my hometown community and have spent the past 13 years working in Greenwich as a land use planner in the private sector. I currently live in Wilton with my husband and 2 daughters, Caitlyn (age 11) and Ella (who turned 5 today!). My husband and I chose to move to Wilton (from Norwalk) because of the quality of Wilton's schools. As a child, our house was redistricted, affecting the schools both my younger sisters attended. As a result, I was particularly drawn to the fact that Wilton runs a very efficient single district school system.

After reviewing proposed Senate Bill #738 and Senate Bill #457, I would like to express my strong opposition to both of these initiatives, which will FORCE municipalities to regionalize and consolidate. Particularly in the instance of Senator Looney's proposed Bill (#738), the lines on which he has proposed district consolidation is alarming. The TOWN of Wilton has different needs than the CITY of Norwalk. To FORCE these two municipalities to compete for resources and services will be detrimental to both communities. In addition, this bill does not consider a municipality's student population (only total population). Wilton has over 4,000 students, which it educates in 4 school buildings. This is a very efficient system and works well for our Town. I would also note that in all the research I've come across regarding school and district consolidation, the merging of the Wilton School District and the Norwalk School District would create a district size that is far too large to be economically or academically efficient. As a proponent of maintaining the highest standards of education for our children, I would like to point out that NEITHER of these bills aim to improve the educational quality of our schools. My husband and I, along with literally every single friend and acquaintance we have in Wilton, moved here for the Town's schools. It is the number 1 driving factor for a vast majority of Connecticut residents. It drives our housing market and our local economies. The very proposal of these bills has created so much uncertainty about the future of CT and the affected municipalities that I personally know people who are seriously looking at moving out of the state – and not just internet searches on Realtor.com or Zillow – but going on job interviews and making trips to look at homes in other states. These bills could not be worse for Fairfield County and beyond. One of the shining lights in this state has always been our stellar reputation for high quality education. If this legislature takes that away from us, I would not remain a CT resident. I chose to pay a premium cost of living to provide my children with a quality education in a Town that aligns with my lifestyle. If that is taken from us, against our will, the cost of living in this state will no longer be worth the price.

I am also against the proposed Governor's Bill No. 874. Prior to determining my stance on the proposed bills discussed herein, I did research on the pros and cons of school consolidation/regionalization. There have been many studies on this subject. The CT School Finance Project has even undertaken a study of previously issued studies! Why are we going to spend taxpayer dollars to do another study?? The research indicates that only VERY small school districts benefit from consolidation. Why are we going to undertake an extensive study that will undoubtedly leave a cloud of uncertainty over the future of education in our state? That uncertainty will negatively impact our Towns, housing prices and local economies.

Any proposal that takes the choice of educating our families away from the people, from the municipalities, from YOUR CONSTITUANTS, is a frightening and terrifying proposition.

I urge you to vote "NO" on: Senate Bill #738: Senate Bill #457: and Governor's Bill #874.

Thank you,

Michele A. Cronin