



**Testimony
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Before the Education Committee
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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) ***opposes*** SB- 874, **AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT**, which call for the development of a plan for the “redistricting or consolidation of school services and districts” and penalize small school districts.

REDISTRICTING/CONSOLIDATION MANDATE - SB-874 establishes a Commission on Shared School Services (COSSS) to “develop a plan for the redistricting or consolidation of school services and school districts”. As drafted, this language does *not* facilitate voluntary shared services or regional approaches, it *mandates* redistricting or consolidation without regard for whether this will achieve cost savings or negatively impact the delivery of education.

Research studies indicate that forced consolidation/regionalization: (1) does not guarantee any savings and may actually increase costs for many towns; (2) generally requires significant upfront costs; (3) undermines the quality and delivery of education for many students in small towns; (4) disrupts our communities; and (5) fails to address cost drivers in education budgets.

Section 5 of SB-874 unfairly singles out small school districts and imposes a penalty for not sharing a superintendent. By imposing a penalty on small school districts that retain a separate superintendent, this proposal *forces rather than facilitates* opportunities for improving efficiencies.

SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT PENALTIES - SB-874 unfairly penalizes small school districts even though many larger school districts may have many layers of unnecessary personnel or other inefficiencies. Instead of crafting legislation based on faulty assumptions, lawmakers should initiate a review of spending levels across categories for *all* school districts and determine where there are opportunities to improve efficiencies across the board.

In addition, as drafted, it is unclear whether the board appoints a chief executive officer, and what qualifications such officer should have. It is also unclear how a board of education could “receive direction” from a superintendent not in its employ.

REGIONAL BOARDS OF FINANCE - We support Section 7 of the bill which requires each regional board of education to establish a regional board of finance to review and make recommendations regarding the budget and expenses. This will ensure that costs are appropriately considered by individuals that have a greater understanding of the local finances of the respective towns.



In addition to the revisions we have suggested above, SB-874 should be revised to provide towns with the tools to better control education costs, including:

- (1) Eliminating the Minimum Budget Requirement for Non-Alliance School Districts to provide towns with greater authority to reduce education budgets;
- (2) Addressing concerns and issues facing existing regional school districts; and
- (3) Facilitating the consolidation of non-educational expenditures.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the bill.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.