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Written Testimony of: State Senator Tony Hwang, 28th District
To: The Legislature's Education Committee
In Opposition to: *SB 457, SB 738, SB 874 & HB 7150*
Public Hearing - March 1st, 2019

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony to you today in strong opposition to **forced** school regionalization, and certain cost-shifts onto our municipalities outlined in [SB 457](#), [SB 738](#), and in Governor Lamont's proposed [SB 874](#) & [HB 7150](#).

These bills assume a one size fits all approach to regional school districts. Creating an arbitrary number of students or residents that trigger **forced** regionalization will *not* lead to best results. Depending on the size of the town and part of the state, regionalization could even result in higher costs and reduced efficiencies. For those towns where regionalization creates synergistic opportunities and cost efficiencies, consolidation is already happening and we should focus on breaking down barriers to *natural* regionalization.

We elect our school board members to do what is best for our schools. If those members think regionalizing with another town(s) is responsible and prudent, then it is their responsibility to make that case to the people they represent. That way would certainly lead to better results, where proposals to regionalize certain districts are vetted on a case by case basis instead of just creating a random threshold imposed by the State.

Ways to make our school systems run more efficiently certainly need to be encouraged and investigated, but our end goal is always the same: the best education for our students. Our town BOE's should continue to investigate ways to improve our schools and make things more efficient, but they should not have the threat of forced regionalization hanging over their heads to do that.

Furthermore, SB 874 proposes penalizing small districts that 'choose' not to 're-district' or 'regionalize'. This is a false choice, and this kind of heavy handed approach to forcing a quick and dramatic change to municipal organization reminds me of our previous Governor, not the collaborative persona I have come to expect from the current administration. This is not a carrot; it is a burdensome financial hammer!

And forcing 25% of teachers' pensions, a state obligation, onto towns overnight? How can we expect our municipalities to budget and organize for all these changes and new costs over one budget cycle? Our towns constantly struggle with the state's unpredictable budget. And in the midst of all this uncertainty he is asking for more money from them as well, just as I warned he would in [my letters](#) to the leadership of towns in my district earlier this year and my recent [letter](#) to Governor Lamont. HB 7150 addresses some serious issues in education and I understand that we must find ways to cut costs. However, Section 6 and others that "find savings" simply by pushing costs onto municipalities must be reconsidered.

Encouraging towns to share services is a laudable goal. However, each school and school district has unique needs and forcing towns and cities to regionalize without considering those needs creates a whole host of problems:

1. Less time in the classroom and more time on the bus, especially in rural areas like Newtown, Weston and Easton where proposed districts would be very large geographically.
2. Dramatic increases in busing expenses for towns and cities. While the state used to pay for busing costs, towns and cities are now solely responsible for those costs, and more time on the bus means higher costs to towns.
3. Wasted taxpayer investments in new and newly renovated schools. If your town just invested in a new school renovation, it may now be all for nothing if the school no longer fits the needs of a regional school district.
4. Potential new costs to build new schools to meet regional needs.
5. Raises concerns about how to preserve quality of education.
6. Loss of teaching positions. If towns are forced to consolidate, this could impact number of teachers and classrooms.
7. Loss of local control over school decision making. Forcing regionalization leaves little room for towns, cities and local residents to have a say in what their children are learning.