

**Governors Bill #874: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT.**

Dear Esteemed Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Governors bill #874; *AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT.*

**Purpose:** There is no rationale for the stated purpose or necessity of this bill. It reads as a commission to develop a plan for redistricting or consolidation of school services and school districts. What is the rationale behind the purpose of this piece of legislation? There is no purpose to its purpose as presented.

**Applicability:** All components of this bill, except for the sharing of Superintendent based on defined numbers in municipal population, student's enrollment and number of elementary schools, apply to all districts in the state, even those that are already regionalized and sharing services.

The term "**redistricting**" is present in the bill which the Governor has clearly and publicly stated should not be in this bill, therefore the public is unclear on why that term is present 7 times within the bill and the Commissions charge.

The **Commission make up** lacks key stakeholder groups that should be at the table given its provisions and requirements upon them, namely CCM, CT Council on Small Towns, special education representation given the "Centers for Excellence" provision, and CT PTA since currently only 1 parent from the entire state is identified to be included, or simply more parents from our various regions.

The bill lacks vision for the **deconsolidation of very large districts**, which a plethora of research readily available to you would indicate is where the greater opportunity to find efficiencies lay.

The bill does not mention nor include any **indicator(s) of meeting or exceeding the states expectations** in performance, growth, quality, outcomes or student achievement and mastery of the state's own identified criteria. Therefore, as a proposal before the education committee it is wholly insufficient in regard to this committee's charge- achievement of students. The study, if considered, should have included research on size, governance structures, funding and outcomes based on actuals from our state over time and a comprehensive review of the literature and research on the matter.

**Timeline:** Within the bills requirements the Commission shall not only be appointed but deliver in 5 months its first reports. To ask each local or regional board of education to create its first report due by September of 2019, 3 months post any possible passage of this bill given summer conditions, is unrealistic. In but 7 months post possible passage, the Commission would be required to *"deliver a report containing preliminary recommendations concerning school district sizes and types, including, but not limited to, the total number of school districts, types of school districts, total number of schools in a school district and enrollment of school districts"*. **How is that possible when all of the other reports on special education, before care, after care, transportation, athletics, employment contracts and financial projections on savings and costs are due AFTER their recommendations on district sizes, number of districts and enrollment would be due?** "Financial projections on savings and costs resulting from school district redistricting or consolidation" are not due by the Commission until 12 months **AFTER** recommendations on total number of districts. Since this bill is based on fiscal efficiencies should the fiscal component not be the very first item to be reported on, rather than the last in December 2020?

**Strike the Stick:** *"Not later than October 1, 2020, develop a report containing preliminary recommendations concerning the use of incentives, grants or tax changes to accomplish any of the other preliminary recommendations developed pursuant to this section."* Despite public commentary, these are in fact sticks. Given the bills applicability to ALL districts, a clear void in language that any sticks be applied to only those to whom such

Commission recommendations apply despite size, existing regionalization or shared services, would be unfounded as drafted. This is the piece of this bill where the “forced” is found. To suggest, that should a municipality disagree with any recommendations from an appointed body lacking in representation of key stakeholders, be subject to a small appointed groups financial punishment, while simultaneously be heralded as “voluntary” or a “carrot” is disingenuous at best. Given the large number of bills, from both within this committee and outside of this committee, that apply to public school districts, public school teachers, public school students and public school facilities it is evident that members of this body clearly are out of touch with the amount of time or resources available to meet the endless stream of additions to implement while addressing those already in existence. **Your education policy is out of alignment with your education budget, hence capping grants (ECS, Excess Cost) against their formula levels.**

**Federal Law:** There is no provision within this bill for the Commission to adhere to federal education laws. Should you consider passage and/or amendment of the language contained within this bill such amendment must be added, lest the Commission not be charged to adhere to existing federal laws applicable to public schools receiving federal funds and federally approved state plans.

**Section 5 (b):** There is no definition of **Chief Executive of the Board**

**State Reimbursement for building projects/Commission or Education/DAS:** Again, this section applies to all school whether the commission, within its recommendations find that there is no applicability to any particular district or school districts given their size or a finding of already shared services or regionalization. This reduced state reimbursement provision would remain applicable to all, serving as a disincentive to maintain facilities in good standing of the state’s own requirements, with safety, health and an appropriate learning environment for students and staff at the forefront. The language should be amended for its applicability upon the findings of the commission, should this body and the General assembly move forward. In addition as members of the education committee, you would recognize that it is the Commissioner of Education who has the expertise, knowledge and breadth of educational experience to be able to advise on such building projects and not The Department of Administrative Services, since they are not experts per se in education, the education of children, the safety and health issues within schools and a plethora of other topics that relate to a building project being built for the education of our states students. I would advise that the Commissioner or his or her designee remain the consultant of choice.

This bill is not cognizant of the complex education related issues facing your municipalities or our states students and educators. It provides no recognition for what is working in our state; a baseline metric to commence any conversation of improvements on. Without further in depth thought as to its ultimate impact, the language contained within, the disjointed timeline, the fiscal punishments and easily foreseen consequences are but a few of the reasons why I urge the committee having cognizance of such matters to oppose its passage.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Jacobsen

Fairfield