

Senate Bill 457 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SIZE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Senate Bill 738 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Governor's Bill SB 874 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT

Dear Education Committee Members,

I'm writing this afternoon to voice my strong opposition to Senate Bills 457 and 738, and Governor's Bill SB 874.

I grew up in Old Lyme, CT, a small town on the shoreline at the mouth of the CT River. I remember my kindergarten teacher's name, Mrs. Kade. I remember Mr. Martino, our elementary school principal. I remember making my way through the school that my older brother had forged a path through 3 years before me and I remember all of my teachers remembering who he was. Repeat this at Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School and again at Lyme-Old Lyme High School, where I graduated in 1995 in a class of 93 students. I was the Salutatorian and gave a speech at graduation. I remember the face of every single one of my classmates and teachers and I am connected to probably 90% of them on Facebook.

Many groups of close friends stayed in touch throughout college, and after college I moved to Boston where I rented 2 different apartments, and was roommates with 3 different classmates of mine from High School.

I met my best friend of 35+ years in kindergarten. I have friends I graduated with that are married now, dating since they were classmates at Lyme-Old Lyme High School.

Fast forward and after going to college in Atlanta and then moving to Boston for my first couple of jobs, I'm now 42, married with a 6-year old son and a soon to be 4-year old foster son who my wife and I are adopting through DCF... Where did we buy our house? Old Lyme. Why? Because our community is like no other, and the reason for that is the school system. We are raising our family in the same town I had moved away from but wanted to move back to as an adult... for the schools.

My older son is in kindergarten now in the same school I attended 35 years ago. The teachers have changed but the spirit has not. The principal knew his name before his first school year even started. His teacher sends us messages that she's so proud of him for getting over a certain fear or challenge. Other teachers in the school know who he is. He and his "5th Grade Buddy" are already legitimate friends, a few months into the school year.

Our foster son is waiting in the wings. Eager to follow in his big brother's footsteps, as I did all those years ago. A child who was a number to so many people now has a shining future ahead of him in a town with the school system that we, his foster parents, intentionally chose specifically for these reasons.

ALL OF THAT GOES AWAY for these children whose parents chose this life for them under the measures these bills are proposing. I would argue that I always wanted to move back to Old Lyme so that my children could enjoy the riches of a small town education like I did. If that choice is ripped out of our hands by legislators who don't live in our town and who are not raising children in our town, then what are we left with?

As an adult, I've attended the funerals of more than one of my childhood teachers. I've crossed paths with a handful of others over the years. They ALWAYS have remembered me, and me them.

My wife grew up in Montville, CT. Much larger school system. Her guidance counselor never even talked to them about college. Ours helped us understand the best fit for us, because he knew us. He knew who we were, what made us tick, and the schools that we would thrive at.

There isn't a single fiscal argument you can present to me that could change my mind. People like me would support any tax increase to keep what we have. I would cut other expenditures in my life for my kids to be able to attend the size and quality of schools that I did. I would take a second job to make it happen.

There is too much consolidation of everything in our society and our children are not a commodity to cut corners on to make ends meet. We have what we have in small towns like ours because we want them that way. We grow up and move back because it is who we are. The USA is full of unique and important characteristics like this, and we lose who we are as a nation when we lose who we are as a town.

VOTE NO on these measures.

Respectfully,
Ryan Lee, LOLHS Class of 1995
Father of a kindergartener
Foster father of a preschooler
Son of a retired Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School teacher