

Dear Connecticut legislators,

I have been living in Wilton since 2008 (well before having children) and love it here. I, like many Wilton residents, want the best education for our kids and am willing to pay top dollar for it, by way of high real estate prices and a high mill rate. Despite job loss happening all around me and a dismal economic outlook, my family have continued living here and I've even dreamed about starting a business that would serve and better the Wilton community and our kids. When Looney's first school regionalization bill was proposed, I was immediately worried about my kids being redistricted and uprooted from their school and friends because we live on the Wilton/Norwalk border. I feared what Wilton would become with continued decline in property values, exodus from the state, and without the local autonomy to decide what's best for the town I love. And now my business start-up dreams were dashed, or at least postponed during this ambiguous legislative decision making period, because I don't want to take on *additional* risk to starting a business.

As a parent of public school students, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools because a cookie-cutter approach will not work for the diversity of municipalities in Connecticut. Smaller towns should not lose the freedom of choice on education, the thing Wilton residents hold most dear, especially with so much evidence that consolidated schools don't save money and are worse for our students.

I can appreciate the need to find cost efficiencies, particularly if they uncover savings that could be invested back into our towns and state. But why not look at sharing other public services that don't negatively impact the future generation of Connecticutans? And why do you propose bills that will hurt towns like Wilton which already overcontribute to the Connecticut state tax base? I feel as Wilton is doing a great job in managing our costs- already consolidating students into 1 school building for several grade levels, 1 bus system that services all our schools and shuttles our kids to afterschool activities (a godsend for dual working families), and offering resources and amenities which some larger towns don't even have, such as before/extended care, and preschool at the school buildings. I think Wilton is hardly reliant on state funding, and should be rewarded instead of penalized for demonstrating that cost sharing in some areas can work while still preserving quality education for our residents.

I ask you to reject these bills in favor of legislature that prioritizes our kids' quality education while educating towns on all cost sharing measures that are proven to work, and then allowing municipalities the ability to implement what they feel is best for their community. Whether you motivate towns to be more monetarily self-sufficient and less reliant on state funding, or provide incentives to towns to draw in commerce (larger corporations and small start-ups like me), we need to work together to accentuate our kids well-being and create jobs in Connecticut and the small-town communities that attracted us to this state in the first place.

Thanks for listening,

Gigi Leporati, Wilton CT