

SB 738, SB 454 and SB 874 - Testimony for the Education Committee

To whom it may concern,

I am a parent of 4 public school students in Wilton, Connecticut, and I vehemently oppose the bills that would require regionalization of our schools. I urge you to oppose this as well.

The plan has multiple faults and sadly does not have the children's education and best interests at the core of its purpose. This is really an ill-advised attempt to save the state money rather than addressing the real problem of decades of fiscal ineptitude at the state level. Moreover, the plan WILL NOT save money, and it could very well end up costing more. However, what it will do is eliminate local control of schools, cause harm to school quality, negatively impact the culture of the communities and harm the children & environment in the process.

The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools and leveling salaries and sorting through all sorts of legal obligations and contracts will not offset any savings. Please look to research from the 2011 study done by National Education Policy Center, that found the savings from school consolidation are "vastly overestimated". As such, the baseline for support for this proposal is flawed. In addition, there will be increased costs of transportation for much of the schools.

Secondly, when our family needed to move to northeast of New York City for to work obligations, my wife and I spent quite a large amount our time discussing our options for communities. We considered both southern NY and CT. We ended up choosing Wilton, CT mostly for its small personal community and its fantastic school system. We felt the schools were a very important aspect of our decision on where we would raise our family here in CT. I can tell you right now that if I had any idea that Connecticut politicians would even entertain the idea of regionalizing schools, I WOULD NOT have moved to this state! Each one of these communities in CT has its own culture and individuals tastes and expectations. This country is the land of the free and we want to be able to decide how to raise our own children and how to educate them. Instituting mandatory regionalization is taking away our freedom to make those choices. Our community wants to have control over how our schools look and who is educating our children. We also attract a type of teacher who is also looking for that small community feel and has a shared vision with the families. Please don't strip this control and personal freedom away from the towns in CT!

Lastly, regionalization will harm school quality and the children's lives. There is no evidence that proves that larger schools are better than smaller ones. Actually, most people believe for children to grow to their full potential smaller schools with closer bonds provide better educations. As schools get bigger, they become less personal. Larger schools often lose sight of the interpersonal relationships and parents and students are not as engaged in the learning. If you look to the book "Tired of Commuting? Relationships among Journeys to School, Sleep and Exercise among American Teenagers" you'll note that the longer the bus rides for students the lower the academic achievement scores, absenteeism increases and there are health consequences for students. Some of these are consequences are in the form of less exercise and an increase in obesity. Lastly the effects of the longer commute will also have an environmental effect, burning more gasoline and creating more pollution. Seems like a poor choice while we try to educate our children make better environmental decisions for our planet for future generations. The bill suggests the opposite. Please think about the children and our environment and make the right choice for them.

For the reason stated above: the lack of money saving opportunities, harming school quality, negative impacting community culture, eliminating local control over schools, causing harm to children and the environment, please oppose the bills to regionalize Connecticut schools and any other effort to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools. Look to better fiscal policy to solve the state's deficit issues rather than gimmicks that negatively affect our children. If this bill goes through, I promise you that I will be moving my family out of this state. We've already lost so many corporate jobs based on terrible state-level decisions. Let's not keep repeating the same mistakes.

Sincerely,

Timothy Lepore
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