

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee and Any Others Whom It May Concern: 3.19.19

I strongly oppose all sections pertaining to regionalization in HB 7192, including 7 through 10, and in SB 874, including 1 through 4, and any other bill that proposes the creation of a Commission for the purpose of studying the redistricting or consolidation of school services and school districts, developing a plan for forced regionalization or consolidation of Connecticut Public Schools, implementing forced regionalization or consolidation of public schools, and/or penalizing public schools for NOT regionalizing. The reasons for my position are set forth below.

I have not seen any evidence indicating that regionalizing school districts will save money given the costs of combining resources and added transportation costs. More importantly, I have not seen any evidence establishing that regionalization will maintain or improve the quality of education in school districts. According to a report by Hanover Research in 2014 entitled Best Practices for School Improvement Planning, a needs assessment of a failing school district is the first step that must be taken.

A study conducted on K-12 Regionalization in CT on behalf of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving by Rodriguez Data Solutions LLC in May 2018 concludes that:

- regionalization or consolidation does not necessarily result in lower costs in the short or long term, and it can increase costs and negatively affect academic outcomes
- Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford school districts had higher than average per pupil expenditures notwithstanding enrollment greater than 15,000 in 2015-16
- CT districts with 2500-3000 students had the best educational outcomes with per pupil expenditures that were at average or below average levels in 2015-16
- parental involvement results in better academic outcomes and parents are more engaged when schools are small

The above is a very small example of the multiple studies done in many states that do NOT support regionalization. Larger districts are not directly correlated to better student outcomes. Larger school districts alienate local populations of parents and students. Larger school districts alienate populations of disadvantaged students. Larger districts cost more to run due to the need for additional administrative costs to manage the unwieldy nature of it's size and increased transportation.

If Connecticut legislators are truly interested in improving student outcomes they would focus on breaking up larger districts into smaller more manageable sizes rather than just giving the larger districts more money. Many of the larger districts already spend almost equal dollars to smaller districts which have better levels of student outcomes. To improve student outcomes research shows smaller class sizes, local control and local autonomy to create parental involvement improves outcomes. I am a special education advocate and work closely with families and school districts throughout the state to create appropriate education programs for my clients. Consistently the smaller districts are better able to provide the individualized and special education supports in a holistic manner than the larger districts. My experience is staff members in larger districts often do not have the opportunity or time for organic involvement on a regular basis with the teachers and student body. Typically their days are filled with higher office demands which can isolate them from the day to day activities of the classroom.

I strongly urge the legislative body to focus on cost cutting of existing state level initiatives as a primary source for closing the budget gap. I do not believe it is helpful to our economic future to upend a "Home Rule" way of governance, grabbing funds from smaller municipalities to redistribute and thereby removing the ability for residents to have input and control over their own town's autonomy. I also strongly urge the legislators to focus on improving transportation and infrastructure in an effort to attract the next generation of workers and current businesses. This is how to increase funds for the state and close the budget gap. Taking money from smaller municipalities who are fiscally responsible to support larger cities will not be beneficial and ultimately will damage our state.

In summation, I am very concerned that regionalization, reduction in of local control will result in larger enrollment in schools, inadequate administrative support/supervision, longer transportation times for children resulting in

decreased engagement, lower academic scores, and increased absenteeism, a decline in the quality of the education and academic outcomes, and reduced teacher and community engagement.

Further, I believe that regionalization's erosion of the quality of the education in our local schools will affect the CT economy. If new families stop moving to CT towns because the quality of the education in the public schools has deteriorated, new businesses will not be attracted to our towns either. Moreover, existing families and businesses will leave at a greater rate than they are leaving now. This will worsen the state's fiscal crisis.

Please oppose the provisions in HB 7192 and SB 874 that pertain to regionalization, and any other legislation or legislative provisions that proposes creating a Commission for the purpose of studying the redistricting or consolidating of school services and school districts, developing a plan for forced regionalization or consolidation of Connecticut Public Schools, implementing forced regionalization or consolidation of public schools, and/or penalizing public schools for NOT regionalizing.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
Anne Munkenbeck
Wilton, CT