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Re: Regionalization of School Bills SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874

Dear Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my views on SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874. After a review of the bills and relevant research, I am opposed to regionalizing school districts. I have serious concerns about the bills, and the state of CT taking local control away from the towns that effectively and efficiently administer their schools.

My wife and I were living in Stamford when we got married. Our first child was born in 2012, and we began to have discussions about moving to another town with a reputation for great schools. Of all the things that contribute to a community and a sense of belonging, we felt that educational reputation was of the utmost importance. We decided to move to Darien, and bought our house in 2013.

From the time we bought our house in 2013, our property taxes have increased almost 50%. My wife and I had not expected this substantial increase over that 5-year period. Despite this, we knew that when it was time for our children to go to the Darien schools it would be well worth it. One of my concerns with the proposed bills regarding regionalizing schools is that our taxes will increase more dramatically without directly improving the quality of the education that my children will receive.

To understand the benefits of regionalizing schools, I began doing some research. One of the reasons the state may be looking to regionalize schools is to reduce the cost of administering education. The assumption is that regionalization will lead to fewer high level administrators, such as superintendents. Based on the information I've found, the research is inconclusive. While there may be fewer superintendents, there are often multiple slightly lower level positions created within the regional schools districts, such as assistant superintendents, to help the superintendent manage all of the work. When you factor in salaries and benefits costs, the cost efficiencies are greatly reduced or eliminated. The research also concludes that mid-sized school districts are often more efficiently run and provide improved educational outcomes than very small or very large school systems (Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's report entitled, "K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut"). Combining Darien's school district with others would push the overall regionalized district enrollment well above the optimal size outlined in the above referenced report. I believe that creating a super-sized school district spanning multiple towns or cities will reduce the overall quality of the education currently available to Darien students. Further, I have serious concerns about whether school regionalization will actually produce cost savings.

In summary, we moved to Darien for the schools. Our son is in first grade, and we are more than pleased with the education he has received thus far. We are looking forward to our daughter starting kindergarten in the fall. We plan to stay in Darien so that both will benefit from the all of the great resources available within Darien's schools. We are opposed to any state mandate that takes control away from the local community, and the effectively and efficiently run school district.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express my point of view.

Best regards,



Kevin O'Brien