

February 28, 2019

From: Greg Smith, New Canaan, CT; Gregory.m.smith1@gmail.com

Re: CT S.B 457, S.B. 738, S.B. 874

Dear Sirs -- I have been a New Canaan resident since 2005, and am writing to express my strong displeasure with the pending legislation that would impose regionalization of school districts. When my wife & I moved from California to the NY-metro area in 2005, my wife was working in Manhattan and I was working in Westchester, so we looked at moving into different neighborhoods across the region. In fact, we found comparably priced houses in Scarsdale, Rye, Old Greenwich, Westport and New Canaan. We focused on towns with the highest quality schools, but what impacted our decision to move to New Canaan over the other towns was in large part the local autonomy and character of the school district. My wife and I liked the fact that our children could walk from our house to a neighborhood elementary, middle & high school, that the majority of the town residents used the public schools, the high involvement of the local community in the schools, and the myriad of clubs that might not exist in a regional structure. Our kids participate actively in a number of club activities such as the squash team, Model UN and Odyssey of the Mind that require heavy parent involvement, and those have been defining experiences for our children. I worry deeply that the features that initially drew us to New Canaan would be lost with a regional school structure. As such, I can say definitively that had a regional school structure been in place in CT when we moved, we would not have purchased a house in New Canaan, and we would have moved to Westchester where home prices are similar and schools have local autonomy.

I understand that CT leaders are concerned about disparities in school quality across the state. However, I'm convinced these bills will not raise the quality of all schools, but will have the opposite effect. We're already seeing CT having challenges retaining the highest quality businesses with GE & Diageo's announced departures along with the decline of UBS & RBS. I work for a large multinational in Westchester, and when we moved to the area in 2005, most of my peers either lived in Westchester or Fairfield country, and the younger workers frequently lived in Stamford. When I look at my team today, they are roughly split between Manhattan, White Plains, suburban Westchester and Fairfield country. The Millennials are not coming to live in Stamford the way they used to a decade ago, and CT attracts far fewer families. CT needs to figure out how to become a destination for talent, rather than creating angst over school autonomy and quality - specifically, the state should remain focused on retaining and growing the employment base in CT, retaining and attracting large corporations, and improving the infrastructure and quality of life. Further, CT is alienating somewhere on the order of 2,000-3,000 professional employees of PepsiCo who live in CT by proposing a sugary drink tax.

I believe there are much less intrusive ways of improving overall school quality and educational disparity across school districts without pushing families to Westchester and private schools. This may be a very Fairfield country perspective, but I understand that 1/4 of the CT state income taxes are paid by Fairfield country, and the state is going to exacerbate their financial problems if they encourage a mass exodus out of Fairfield county.

Thank you for your consideration, Greg Smith