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Written Testimony

From

Joyce M. Stille, Administrative Officer

Town Of Bolton

For

Education Committee

March 1, 2019

Re: Proposed SB-874 An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **opposition to the provisions in SB-874, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONNECTICUT**, which call for the development of a plan for the “redistricting or consolidation of school services and districts” and penalize small school districts such as Bolton.

The legislation, as drafted, mandates a plan for redistricting or consolidation of school districts. Forced consolidation or regionalization is rarely successful. This is especially troubling since what is best for improving student outcomes should be the first consideration. Bigger does not mean better, nor does bigger guarantee any savings. Transportation costs alone will drive up education costs.

Bolton is one of the smaller school districts this bill would impact. Our pre-kindergarten through 12th grade system has just under 800 students. Currently, Bolton has two sending districts (Hartford and Columbia) that are part of our educational system. The quality of our Town’s educational system is high. Bolton High School has been designated nationally a Blue Ribbon school. Residents have stated that they have moved to Bolton because of our school system. To dismantle it does not make sense based on the provisions of this bill.

We fully support shared services and regional approaches but they need to be fully vetted and voluntary. In education, the end result needs to demonstrate cost savings while preserving or improving the quality of education. We would welcome the opportunity for discussion on our current educational system compared to other systems and regional systems. Even current regional school districts operate very differently. A “best practices” should be developed from the ground up that can serve as a guide. Outlining items that work or fail will only enhance consolidation/redistricting efforts.

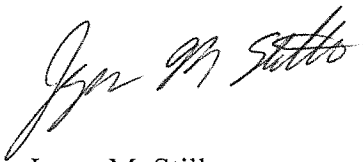
We strongly support Section 7 of the bill which requires each regional board of education to establish a regional board of finance to review and make recommendations regarding the budget and expenses. This will ensure that costs are appropriately considered by individuals that have a greater understanding of the local finances of the respective towns. Representation needs to be the same number of members for all towns however to avoid one town's domination due to size.

In addition to requesting bill revisions based on our comments above, please consider giving us additional tools to control education costs. First, provide town's direct ability to consolidate non-education expenditures to achieve cost savings. Second, eliminate the Minimum Budget Requirement. The way it continues to be administered makes it impossible for us to reduce education costs.

Please reject SB-874 as written. We are very willing to work together with the state to develop an approach that works for all.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if you wish to discuss further.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joyce M. Stille".

Joyce M. Stille

Administrative Officer