

February 28, 2019

Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Opposition to SB 874, SB 738 and SB 457

Dear Education Committee Members,

I am writing to you in **STRONG OPPOSITION** to **SB 874**, **SB 738** and **SB 457**. I am a father of three (3) children who are currently homeschooled. We live in Redding, CT. Every year, my wife and I decide whether or not to place our children in the local public school system (Easton-Redding Region 9 School District). In fact, we moved to our town primarily because of high-quality education our children would receive in our school district, should we decide at any point to stop homeschooling. If any of these three (3) proposed bills are approved and implemented, my wife and I will have serious discussions about either homeschooling through Grade 12 or leaving the State altogether.

My comments on the three (3) proposed bills are as follows:

SB 874

Regionalization of School Districts

I am firmly **opposed to the regionalization of school districts**. This is the first of a thousand cuts that will almost certainly lead to forced school redistricting and the complete re-arrangement of our educational system in the State. I moved to Redding because of the quality of its school system. This is a perfect example of government coercion at its finest. In a recent public “question and answer” session, Governor Lamont recently stated that this bill includes incentives based upon “carrots” but not “sticks”. That is an outright lie, and for him (or anyone else) to state otherwise is either naïve or disingenuous. Penalties include withholding education funds and offering less state funding for school repair and construction projects for towns not sharing superintendents. Education is most efficient on the local level and should stay local, and decisions about our school districts should remain local. A Commission made of up eighteen nameless, faceless bureaucrats should not dictate the fate our children’s education – it should rest upon the individuals residing in our communities.

Homeschooling Regulations (Section 17, Section 18, Section 19)

I am **firmly and specifically** opposed to the three (3) above-noted sections of the SB 874. My comments on these sections are as follows:

- Section 17 – This section of the bill will force all homeschooling parents to register in-person with the school district in which they reside. Although this requirement does not seem objectionable from the outset, I ask what the purpose of this registration is. Undoubtedly, all states have a requirement to ensure that their residents are appropriately educated. However, many peer reviewed studies have documented that homeschooling parents have a strong record of providing their children with academic excellence.¹ Other studies have shown that there is no relationship between the degree of state control of homeschooling (i.e., regulations) and academic achievement.² So I ask again, what is the point of these regulations?

Some research has indicated that these regulations may have resulted from an April 2018 report from the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) examining child abuse and neglect, including the inexcusable death of one child at the hands of his parents. The report studied data from six (6) school districts in CT – including the Hartford Public School System – from 2013 to 2016. It found that, of the 380 students withdrawn from the six (6) school districts to be homeschooled, 138 (or 36%) lived in families that were the subject of at least one (1) prior accepted report to the Division of Children and Family (DCF) for suspected abuse or neglect. Although there is simply no excuse for child abuse and neglect in any fashion, there is strong reason to believe that this data is not representative of the homeschooling population as a whole in Connecticut.

First, the Hartford School District, which is a large school district, already has one of the highest rates of alleged child abuse and neglect in the State of Connecticut, so the results of the study (i.e., 36% noted above) is likely to be over-inflated and cannot be generalized to the overall homeschooling population. Second, the report does not identify the other five (5) school districts, so one does not know if they too have high rates of alleged child abuse relative to the Connecticut overall. Again, this data cannot be generalized to the overall homeschooling population.

More to the point, however, is the fact that DCF already knew of these cases of abuse, including those of the child who died. The study quite clearly shows the failure of DCF in protecting children in these specific cases, and not the failure of homeschooling parents as a whole. Homeschooling is being used as a scapegoat for the failures of DCF in protecting our children.

Lastly, one of our State representatives recently divulged the fact that school districts would be providing DCF with the names of all registered homeschooling residents in Connecticut. Of course, this is not stated in the bill, nor does it need to be for it to happen. This type of government over-reach will only lead us down a path of more unnecessary regulation and oversight that would put a

¹ Ray, Brian, Ph.D. and B. Eagleson. 2008. "State Regulation of Homeschooling and Homeschoolers' SAT Scores". Academic Leadership: The Online Journal. Volume 6, Article 27, Issue 3.

² Ray, Brian, Ph.D. 2004. "Worldwide Guide to Homeschooling" Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, Publ.

burden (because of financial and time constraints) for homeschooling parents who would just rather spend time teaching our children.

- Section 18 – This section of the bill will force school districts to provide model curricula and frameworks for reading and mathematics to homeschooling parents for children in Pre-K to Grade 4. We believe that this is completely unnecessary for the following three (3) reasons:
 - 1) The curricula of specific schools are already on school websites;
 - 2) The models and frameworks are already on the Department of Education website; and
 - 3) There is already a significant amount of curricula/models/frameworks that homeschooling parents can choose from that is specific to a child’s grade and/or educational needs.

- Section 19 – This section of the bill will require the Department of Education to review the need to provide model curricula and frameworks in reading and mathematics to homeschooling parents for Grades 5 to 8. For the reasons noted above in Section 18, this is not necessary.

SB 738

I am firmly **opposed to the regionalization of school districts**. Please refer to my comments above under the section entitled “Regionalization of School Districts”.

SB 457

I am firmly **opposed to the regionalization of school districts**. Please refer to my comments above under the section entitled “Regionalization of School Districts”.

For the future of education in this State, and for the future financial state of Connecticut, I ask you to **VOTE NO** on **SB 874**, **SB 738** and **SB 457**.

Although I do not believe that the State necessarily cares about decreasing property values, I do know that it does care about its tax base. Residents are already leaving Connecticut (and other “high-tax” states) in droves. The passage of any of these three (3) bills will lead to residents and businesses leaving Connecticut, resulting in a further reduction in the already thinning tax base for the State. Rahm Emanuel once said that he would “never let a good crisis go to waste”, and our State’s financial crisis has allowed Governor Lamont to followed suit by unnecessarily burdening our already high-quality educational system, which is one of the main reasons people choose to remain in, or move to, our state.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Ungerer