February 28, 2019

Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Via e-mail: edtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Re: S.B. 738: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
S.B. 457: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SIZE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS
S.B. 874: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN CONN

Members of the Education Committee:

Westport First Selectman Jim Marpe and Second Selectwoman Jennifer Tooker are opposed to S.B. 738, S.B. 457 and S.B. 874, and request that you do not approve for further action by the Legislature. Both of us have previously served as members of the Westport Board of Education. In addition, we have also been active board members on state-wide education organizations. Our knowledge on educational issues in the State of Connecticut is deep, and we are passionate advocates for quality education for all students.

In our opinion, the most troubling aspect of these three bills is not only the fact that they suggest or mandate regional consolidation of our schools, but not one of them addresses student outcomes. It is irresponsible to talk about changes to an educational model without speaking to the quality of education delivered.

The achievement gap in the State of Connecticut is one of the worst in the country. There is no single solution to bridging that gap. The problems are complicated, therefore the solutions are as well. However, regional consolidation is not the obvious answer to solve this problem. Actually, it's quite the opposite. Local control of schools which reflect the needs of the local community is an important component of delivering superior education. Westport is a perfect example of that model. Excellent public education for our children has always been a clear priority for our community. Westporters demand accountability at a local level, responding to community feedback and educational needs.

Rather than force consolidation for the purposes of saving money, we encourage you to force local accountability for student educational outcomes. Westporters contribute approximately $200M per year in income taxes to the State of Connecticut, and receive relatively little funding in return. That money is clearly being invested in other communities around the State of Connecticut, specifically for educational purposes through the ECS formula. Westporters accept that obligation, but let’s see results. Let’s hold all local communities accountable for educational student outcomes.

We firmly support efforts to improve education and reduce the achievement gap in our state, but we object to any bills that attempt to shift responsibility for years of failed management of our state budget onto our children and educators. There is no obvious benefit to our children if regional consolidation is
pursued. There is no evidence that these bills will improve the quality of education in Westport or in other communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James S. Marpe, First Selectman
Town of Westport

Jennifer Tooker, Second Selectwoman
Town of Westport

CC: State Senator Will Haskell, Will.Haskell@cga.ct.gov
State Senator Town Hwang, Tony.Hwang@cga.ct.gov
State Representative Jonathan Steinberg, Jonathan.Steinberg@cga.ct.gov
State Representative Gail Lavielle, Gail.Lavielle@housegop.ct.gov