

Good evening, Honorable Committee Members; thank you for this opportunity to testify before you.

My name is Tod Jones, and I chair the Kent Democratic Town Committee. In speaking for the members of my committee, I am speaking for them as citizens of Kent, rather than simply as Democrats. We have long contended that the town of Kent has been arbitrarily cordoned into a General Assembly District - the 108th - among towns with which we enjoy few commonalities of interest. For almost forty of my forty-nine years, I have lived fewer than nine miles from my present home in the village of Kent: ten years in Sherman, two years in Gaylordsville, and nearly 28 years in Kent. Consequently, I have an intimate knowledge of the towns of the 108th district, comprised of Kent, Western New Milford, Sherman and New Fairfield. From my boyhood until now, I have always realized that the towns of the Candlewood Lake Valley, such as Sherman, New Fairfield and New Milford, and the towns of the Upper Housatonic River Valley, where Kent is situated, form two very distinct communities, with very different regional atmospheres. Every Kent resident feels this instinctively.

I graduated from the Sherman School and from New Milford High School, and grew up to see my daughter graduate from Kent Center School and Housatonic Valley Regional High School. I would scarcely need to emphasize to any long-time resident of my town that the rural, widespread Region One School District - to which Kent belongs - and the densely populated New Milford School District are two very different educational environments with distinct challenges and needs.

For more than 25 years I worked in New Milford at a stone fabrication shop. Now my wife and I are owner-operators of a small business in Kent. Every citizen of Kent is well aware how very different are the business climate and economy of Kent from those of an increasingly urbanized New Milford. Kent's economy depends upon, firstly, the three private schools which operate there, and secondly upon a village retail and hospitality base which rely upon tourism. And the tourists are attracted by the unique charm of our village center, and by the beauty of the rural environs. New Milford, on the other hand, is a town which has always had an industrial base, supplemented by an ever growing tangle of box stores and strip malls.

The plain fact of the matter is that in the pursuit and protection of those interests which are vital to the Town of Kent - governance, education, economic development, tourism, preservation of regional character - Kent is already working in constant cooperation with its neighboring towns in the Northwest Corner, our natural regional allies, and not with New Milford, New Fairfield and Sherman. Among the towns of the 108th General Assembly district, Kent is the sole member of the Region One School District, the Northwest CT Council of Governments, The Northwest Regional Planning Collaborative, The Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, and the Upper Housatonic Valley Heritage Area, to name just a few

of the associations which bind us to the small towns of the northwest corner.

What possible benefit can accrue to Kent from being isolated in a legislative district with towns that do not share its character or its concerns, and with which we do not plan and work to achieve common goals? Towns which form communities of interest ought to be able together to command the attention and service of a mutual State Representative who is dedicated to their common needs. That is why I respectfully appeal to the Members of the General Assembly Reapportionment Committee to place Kent in a district with those towns of the Northwest Corner with which we habitually cooperate in the pursuit of our mutual interests: Salisbury, Sharon, Cornwall, Goshen and the like; towns currently in the 64th district.

Thank you very much for your time.

Tod Jones
8 Locust Lane, P.O. Box 161
Kent CT, 06757
(860) 927-4540
todbentonjones@hotmail.com