

Heather Santos
77 Hagstrom Rd
North Grosvenordale, CT 06255
November 8, 2016

Re: Privatizing Buses

Dear Board of Education Members:

My name is Heather Santos and I'm a lifelong resident of Thompson and mother to two Mary R. Fisher Elementary students. I have recently heard that the BOE is considering privatizing the bus service in Thompson and wanted to voice my concerns to you as I am often unable to attend meetings in person.

As a mother and taxpayer I have multiple concerns if Thompson moves towards privatization. I have reached out to many of my Woodstock friends who have just recently been through this exact same process and have heard very mixed reviews with more negatives than positives. I have bulleted by concerns below:

- **The issues with a for profit company:** A "For profit" company will be determining and dictating bus routes, times and stop locations. They often make revisions not putting the safety of the children and convenience of the families first but what might expedite the route and/or save the company money. In my discussions with Woodstock, with the transition, various routes were changed some of them resulting in drastic pick-up/drop off times that were much different than in the past creating hardships for families that have their work schedules revolving around that previous approx. time. Many friends were forced into "group pick-up spots" when previously the bus would pick-up each child approx. at their home forcing some children to walk several houses down to the group location often on roads that don't have sidewalks nor street lights (and when the time change occurs these morning walks are in dark conditions).
- **Inconsistency:** At the beginning Woodstock had many hiccups with schedule and drivers not be consistent and though some of this has gone away it is still very much present. My family has been blessed with having the same bus driver for the past 4 years that we loved. She has since taken employment elsewhere and for several weeks during the transition to our new permanent bus driver was left with several new faces that didn't know my kids names, where they lived, or the route. As the last stop on the bus route this left us with a window of drop off that was anywhere from being on time to being up to 40 mins late. Without control over permanent consistent drivers I feel this would be the new norm.

- **Driver Shortages:** I have heard and read of private bus companies on occasion having issues with driver shortages which will only hurt Thompson Public School families. What is our protection from this happening?
- **Bus Safety:** Without the guarantee of having a familiar face as your regular driver, I have real concerns about the driver not knowing the children's names, being able to call them out if they are misbehaving, knowing and understanding behavior issues/history on the bus, and being able to put a face to who gets off at what stop. I have heard from my children that when there are substitute bus drivers the kids act out, do not get reprimanded, and on a few occasions young children that fell asleep missed their bus stop (which if it was a regular driver they would have known the child and woke them up). Can we guarantee a consistent driver that knows the route and children's names if it is privatized? What is the control?
- **Costs and the future:** Though I understand the intrigue on peeling this piece of responsibly off the town and possibly saving a few bucks along the way – this savings is not guaranteed. Though it may seem as such on paper today – the fact is we live in a rural area with very little options (we don't have dozens of bus companies to choose from or switch to if our relationship with one fails). There is strong possibility of price gouging several years down the road when we are left with no choice but to pay what they demand. If we jump in both feet into a privatized bus service and sell off our town buses for pennies on the dollar we will NEVER have the money to buy new ones back again. You see what happens when the town asks for more money for basic school needs and budget approvals. If the buses are sold color them gone forever.

As a life-long resident, I love this town and support it's schools and budgets. I want to see us prosper and have money for the things we need however I don't think saving a quick buck now on this item is a smart one for the future.

Sincerely,



Heather Santos