



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 350

February Session, 2000

Substitute House Bill No. 5531

House of Representatives, April 3, 2000

The Committee on Human Services reported through REP. GERRATANA of the 23rd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Braille Literacy Task Force.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (a) There is established a Braille Literacy Advisory
2 Council which shall (1) review braille literacy and assess the
3 availability of services for visually impaired children of school age, (2)
4 collect data on the frequency with which an individualized education
5 plan contains a recommendation or determination that a visually
6 impaired child should not be taught braille and the reasons therefor,
7 (3) evaluate the learning media assessments for visually impaired
8 children and the need for a common standard for such assessments
9 which shall be periodically reviewed, (4) develop a plan to attract
10 qualified teachers for visually impaired children, (5) assess methods to
11 improve coordination between the Board of Education and Services for
12 the Blind and local education agencies which employ teachers of
13 visually impaired children relative to braille instruction and the
14 teaching of such children and the expansion of professional

15 development programs for teachers of visually impaired children
16 employed by said board and such agencies, (6) encourage local school
17 districts to require vendors of school textbooks to provide electronic or
18 braille versions of such books in the American Standard Code for
19 Information Interchange format or other text-based computer
20 accessible format in a timely fashion, and (7) review the caseloads and
21 direct service time of teachers of visually impaired children employed
22 by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind and teachers of
23 such children employed by local education agencies, and assess the
24 literacy of such children attending schools with such teachers.

25 (b) Said advisory council shall consist of the following members: (1)
26 The Commissioner of Education or the commissioner's designee; (2)
27 the executive director of the Board of Education and Services for the
28 Blind or said director's designee; (3) one representative of the National
29 Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, appointed by the president pro
30 tempore of the Senate; (4) one teacher of visually impaired children
31 employed by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind,
32 appointed by the majority leader of the Senate; (5) one teacher of
33 visually impaired children employed by a local education agency,
34 appointed by the minority leader of the Senate; (6) one public school
35 administrator, appointed by the speaker of the House of
36 Representatives; (7) one visually impaired public high school student
37 who reads and writes braille, appointed by the majority leader of the
38 House of Representatives; (8) one representative of the Connecticut
39 Council of the Blind, appointed by the minority leader of the House of
40 Representatives; and (9) one parent of a visually impaired child of
41 school age enrolled in a public school, appointed by the Governor.

42 (c) All appointments to the advisory council shall be made no later
43 than sixty days after the effective date of this section. Any vacancy
44 shall be filled by the appointing authority.

45 (d) The advisory council shall elect a chairperson from among its

46 members, except that the speaker of the House of Representatives and
47 the president pro tempore of the Senate shall select the chairpersons
48 for the first meeting of the advisory council. Such chairpersons shall
49 schedule the first meeting of the advisory council, which shall be held
50 no later than ninety days after the effective date of this section.

51 (e) Any member who fails to attend fifty per cent of all meetings
52 held during any calendar year shall be deemed to have resigned from
53 office. Members of the advisory council shall serve without
54 compensation.

55 (f) Not later than January 1, 2001, and annually thereafter, the
56 advisory council shall submit a report on its findings and
57 recommendations to the joint standing committees of the General
58 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, human
59 services and appropriations and the budgets of state agencies.

60 Sec. 2. Not later than January 1, 2001, the Braille Literacy Advisory
61 Council established under section 1 of this act shall submit a report to
62 the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having
63 cognizance of matters relating to human services and to the select
64 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
65 relating to aging on the necessity of establishing a task force to
66 evaluate the unmet needs of adults who have low vision.

67 Sec. 3. (a) Not later than January 1, 2002, the Board of Education and
68 Services for the Blind and the Department of Education shall submit a
69 report to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly
70 having cognizance of matters relating to education and human services
71 and to the Braille Literacy Advisory Council established under section
72 1 of this act on their efforts concerning the certification of teachers of
73 the visually impaired.

74 (b) Not later than January 1, 2002, the Board of Education and
75 Services for the Blind shall submit a report to the joint standing

76 committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
77 relating to education and human services and to the Braille Literacy
78 Advisory Council established under section 1 of this act (1) on the
79 amount of reimbursement requested by local education agencies for
80 each pupil entitled to receive special educational instruction in
81 accordance with the provisions of section 10-295 of the general
82 statutes, and (2) concerning access to, and utilization of, uncharged
83 support services, including professional development programs, by
84 local education agencies on a per town basis.

85 Sec. 4. This act shall take effect from its passage.

HS Committee Vote: Yea 18 Nay 0 JFS

The following fiscal impact statement and bill analysis are prepared for the benefit of members of the General Assembly, solely for the purpose of information, summarization, and explanation, and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either House thereof for any purpose:

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: Minimal Cost

Affected Agencies: Board of Education and Services for the Blind,
Department of Education

Municipal Impact: Minimal Cost

Explanation

State and Municipal Impact:

The bill would result in a minimal cost to the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the Department of Education and selected local education agencies related to staff time and expenses for participation on the Braille Literacy Advisory Council. It is anticipated that these costs would be minimal and can be absorbed within normal budgetary resources.

OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5531

***AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
BRAILLE LITERACY TASK FORCE.***

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes an unpaid, nine-member Braille Literacy Advisory Council. It must study and, beginning January 1, 2001, make annual reports and recommendations to the Education, Human Services, and Appropriations committees about Braille services for, and the literacy of, blind or visually-impaired school-age children.

The bill requires the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) to submit reports to the Education and Human Services committees and the advisory council. It requires the council, by January 1, 2001, to report to the Human Services and Aging committees on the need for a task force to evaluate the unmet needs of adults with low vision (those able to read print with magnification or other assistance).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

ISSUES TO STUDY

The advisory council must:

1. review school-age visually impaired children's ability to read and write Braille and assess the availability of services for them;
2. find out how often, and why, their special education plans do not include Braille instruction;
3. evaluate learning media assessments being used to select instructional materials and teaching strategies for school-age visually impaired children and decide whether there should be a

common, periodically reviewed, standard;

4. develop a plan to attract to Connecticut qualified teachers for children with visual impairments;
5. assess methods to better coordinate Braille instruction and other activities between BESB and local education agencies (LEAs) that employ teachers for their visually impaired students (“itinerant teachers”), and expand professional development programs for them;
6. encourage local school districts to require textbook vendors to provide schools with Braille, electronic, or text-based computer accessible format versions, in a timely manner;
7. review the caseloads of BESB teachers (“education consultants”) and itinerant teachers and the amount of time they spend on one-on-one instruction of visually impaired students (“direct service time”); and
8. assess the ability of visually impaired children to read and write (presumably by comparing their skills with those of their sighted peers).

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

The bill makes the education commissioner and BESB executive director, or their designees, council members. Legislators must appoint the remaining seven members within 60 days of the bill’s passage, and fill council vacancies, as follows:

1. a National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut representative, appointed by the Senate president pro tempore;
2. a Connecticut Council of the Blind representative, appointed by the House minority leader;
3. an education consultant, appointed by the Senate majority leader;
4. an itinerant teacher, appointed by the Senate minority leader;

5. a public school administrator, appointed by the House speaker;
6. a visually impaired, Braille-reading public high school student, appointed by the House majority leader; and
7. a parent of a visually impaired public school student, appointed by the governor.

The speaker and Senate president must select chairpersons for the first council meeting, which must be held within 90 days of the bill's passage. The council must then elect a chairperson.

Any member who attends fewer than half of a calendar year's meetings must be deemed to have resigned.

BESB AND SDE REPORTS

Under the bill, BESB and SDE must report to the Education and Human Services committees and the council by January 1, 2002 on their efforts to create certification requirements for teachers of the visually impaired. By the same date, BESB must report to them on: (1) how much of BESB's per-pupil education subsidy (up to \$6,400 per year for children with visual impairments only, and up to \$11,000 for those with multiple disabilities) LEAs have requested for each of their pupils entitled to them and (2) each LEA's access to, and use of, BESB uncharged support services, such as in-service training and other professional development programs.

BACKGROUND

Blind and Visually Impaired

A person is blind if his central visual acuity is 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses, or if his visual field is restricted to an angle of 20 degrees or less. A person is visually impaired if his acuity is 20/70 or less, with correction.

BESB

BESB's Division of Children Services provides specialized education services to blind and visually impaired children from birth to high school graduation or age 21. Education consultants provide technical assistance to local boards of education, public schools, and parents; and one-on-one classroom instruction to children with visual impairments. BESB also provides Braille and large print books and related special reading and writing supplies and equipment.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Report
Yea 18 Nay 0