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Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:
#54 *Cathrine Holahan*

Date: Bill Number: **7356**
1413

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TESTIMONY OF CONNE
H.B. 7356, An Act Concerning Off-Campus Assault and Battery,
and
S.B. 1413 An Act Concerning In-School Suspensions

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the Education Committee. I am testifying today on behalf of the Children at Risk unit of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS). The Children at Risk unit at CLS provides legal representation to low-income families who have children with disabilities, primarily to assist in obtaining access to special education and mental health services.

I am testifying today to express concern regarding two bills currently before the Education Committee.

H.B. 7356 – An Act Concerning Off-Campus Assault and Battery – CLS opposes H.B. 7356, which would significantly broaden school districts’ authority to expel students from school for almost anything. First, the title is misleading and does not represent the proposed change to the law. The new language would authorize expulsion of students “whose continued presence in a school is seriously disruptive of another student’s educational performance.” Second, the language is so broad that it fails to give notice to students regarding the type of conduct that would be expellable under this provision. The language is not specific to on-campus or off-campus conduct and does not even specify that the conduct must be a violation of a publicized policy of the board. At a time when school districts are expelling students at record numbers in Connecticut and simultaneously failing to respond adequately to complaints of bullying by students, this proposed change in the law will likely result in increased expulsions that could have been prevented by appropriate interventions.

S.B. 1413 An Act Concerning In-School Suspensions – CLS supports S.B. 1413, which would reduce out-of-school suspensions, but request that it be modified. The language in line 5 that is proposed to be deleted limits in-school suspensions “for no more than five consecutive school days.” That qualifying language is crucial to ensuring that students are not placed in in-school suspension indefinitely and should not be eliminated from the statute. **We propose leaving the language as is or amending the language in line 10 to “no more than 10 consecutive school days”.**

In conclusion, Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. strongly urges the Education Committee to **oppose H.B. 7356, and to modify line 5 in S.B. 1413.** I thank you for your time and consideration of these matters.

