



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Public Hearing Testimony

Judiciary Committee

March 4, 2015



H.B. No. 6186 AN ACT PROTECTING SCHOOL CHILDREN.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) **offers the following comments regarding** H.B. No. 6186, An Act Protecting School Children.

This bill makes a number of very important modifications to mandated reporting generally and school reporting specifically. DCF receives over 45,000 reports each year and opens approximately 30,000 investigations of suspected child abuse or neglect or referrals for family assessment response and mandated reporters account for over 75% of those reports. In 2014, school employees made 7,837 reports which accounted for 25.6% of all accepted reports. When mandated reporters fail to report, they put children at substantial risk.

Section 2 changes the legal standard for reporting child abuse or neglect from "*reasonable cause to suspect or believe*" to "*reasonable suspicion.*" The section also includes language requiring school employees to report suspected abuse/neglect of a student over the age of 18, unless such student is in an adult education program, and it establishes penalties for "*intentionally or unreasonably interfering*" with the making of a report. DCF supports all of the provisions of this section of the bill.

DCF also supports sections 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 12 of the bill which strengthen penalties and includes provisions related to students over the age of 18.

Some sections deal with matters of educational policy within the jurisdiction of the State Department of Education – subsection (a) of section 6, section 11, section 13 and section 14 - and we will defer to SDE for their expertise.

The Department does have concerns regarding the potential fiscal impact of requiring in-person training and refresher training for all school employees in section 1 of the bill. Currently, DCF has over 172 staff who are trained to provide mandated reporter training for all groups of mandated reporters. We provide “Train the Trainer” trainings for our staff who provide these trainings in the community as a secondary responsibility of their job duties. Such training are available upon request and free of charge. Last year, we provided training to 14,504 individuals. In addition, we provide on-line training to an addition 29,873 individuals. We would like to point out that DCF is in the process of updating the online training to include a test and verification of completion on an individual basis. We believe that this may provide a constructive, cost-effective alternative to the requirement for in-person trainings.

We are also concerned about the establishment of a special Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation Fund in section 7, the proceeds of which would be funded by forfeited grant payments from local school districts outlined in subdivision (4) of subsection (f) of section 6. DCF investigations have been, and should continue to be, supported by General Fund appropriations. The Department believes we should explore other mechanisms to ensure compliance with the training requirements of this act.

Finally, we suggest that the Committee omit the last sentence of section 10 on lines 319 through 322. While it may be appropriate to utilize multidisciplinary teams for the investigation of some reports of abuse in school settings, we believe that it may dilute the effectiveness of these teams to have them participate in all school investigations.

The Department would appreciate the opportunity to work with the sponsors of this legislation on the modifications suggested in our testimony as this bill moves forward through the process.