

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-453

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING CLASSROOM SAFETY AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR.

Vote Date: 3/23/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.: 480

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Rep. Bob Godfrey, 110th Dist.

Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky, 85th Dist.

Rep. Henry J. Genga, 10th Dist.

Sen. Anthony Guglielmo, 35th Dist.

Rep. Bobby G. Gibson, 15th Dist.

Rep. Brenda L. Kupchick, 132nd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

SB 453 adds to the bullying statutes the term “daily classroom safety,” defined as a classroom environment free from assault, harassment, verbal abuse, or physical harm by students, school employees, or parents toward students and school employees. It also requires board of education to address daily classroom safety in their safe school climate plans and have their school district safety committee review daily classroom safety procedures.

It requires SDE to (1) document districts’ needs for training related to daily classroom safety and (2) report annually to the ED and KIDS committees and legislative leaders on violations of daily classroom safety in the state.

It adds daily classroom safety to SDE and SERC’s safe school climate resource network. It also requires district safe school climate coordinators and safe school climate committees to address daily classroom safety. It establishes parental and board notification procedures for when a student violates daily classroom safety.

Additionally, it allows teachers to remove from class any student who has (1) assaulted the teacher or other students (2) repeatedly committed verified acts of bullying, or (3) engaged in

violations of daily classroom safety. It also allows teachers who have removed such students to determine whether the student may return to class, but gives the safe school climate committee authority to ultimately determine if the return is warranted. It allows an administrator to place the student in another educational setting, including another classroom, alternative education, or in-school suspension.

Substitute language removes the requirement that boards of education maintain a social worker-to-student ratio of 1:250. In Section 1, it adds a list of specific daily classroom safety topics to be added to the safe school climate plans.

It also adds Section 10, which allows teachers to remove violating students from class and to determine whether the student may return to class, but gives the safe school climate committee authority to determine the return is warranted. The administrator may place the student in another educational setting, including another classroom, alternative education, or in-school suspension.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Steven Hernandez, Executive Director, Commission on Women, Children and Seniors:

Commissioner Hernandez testified on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors without explicitly expressing his support or opposition to SB 453. He argued that the Commission has two concerns about revising the current statute to add language regarding “daily classroom safety”. First, he stated that “daily classroom safety” is broad and subjective, and adding mental health services as a result of disruptive behavior requires further clarification so that the services offered do not appear punitive in nature. Second, he added that the broad definition of “daily classroom safety” allows for further instances of suspension and expulsion of students where expulsion rates are already high in Connecticut.

Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of the Department of Education:

Commissioner Wentzell testified on behalf of the Department of Education without explicitly opposing or supporting SB 453. Nevertheless, she expressed the Department’s serious concerns with several sections of the bill. She argued that, in the last four years, the Department had lost 56 full time employees and is therefore not well-positioned to collect, review and approve safe school climate plans for every district across the state.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Michael Casey, Connecticut Education Association:

Mr. Casey testified on behalf of the Connecticut Education Association in support of SB 453. He asserted that disruptive behavior is a serious problem in his school and it interferes with teachers’ ability to teach and students’ ability to learn. He stated that disruptive behaviors are a growing trend in schools and start at a very young age. He asked the Legislature to require districts to put in place protocols so as to protect student and staff from dangerous conduct. He also urged legislators to promote open dialogue between administration and classroom teachers to address such problems. He claimed that doing so will help to identify these behaviors at an early stage and will help provide those children the interventions and support they need.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities testified in support of the intent of SB 453 with the exception of Section 9. They stated that they support any efforts to ensure students are provided a safe learning environment. However, they expressed concerns that the bill might impose additional underfunded and/or unfunded mandates on municipalities. They also claimed that the bill may duplicate local efforts to deal with the issue.

Virginia A. DeLong, Chairman, Boards of Directors, Connecticut School Counselor Association:

Ms. DeLong testified on behalf of the Connecticut School Counselor Association in support of SB 453. She asserted that the Association was particularly in favor of Section 9 in its effort to require each local and regional board of education to maintain a school social worker to student ratio for the school district of one social worker for every 250 students. She argued that with the appropriate access to school social workers, support staff can improve the early identification of students in need of more intensive services, can connect families to treatment and can increase school safety. She also mentioned that they supported the remainder of the bill which ensures that there is reporting, recommendations and a focus on school climate and especially on bullying, teen dating violence and suicide prevention. Furthermore, she stated that, as the mental health needs of students have increased over the past years, improving the number of mental health support staff in schools is essential. As such, she claimed that it would be a disservice to leave school counselors and school psychologists out of the bill, as they are able to reply to students' social, emotional and mental health needs and to identify students who may have greater needs. Lastly, she argued that even though the Association greatly supports school counselors at a 1:250 ratio, they understand that they could face resistance from local school districts. As such, she proposed the following language to be added to the bill: "The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education".

Sue Felleton, Ph.D., UniServ Representative for the Connecticut Education Association:

Ms. Felleton testified on behalf of the Connecticut Education Association in support of SB 453. She argued that she has seen disruptive behavior in classrooms, retelling two specific incidents. Further, she asserted that the Committee has an opportunity to increase safety in the classroom by expanding the scope of existing safety committees, enlarging the reporting requirements and providing additional social workers.

Robyn Kaplan-Cho, Staff of the Connecticut Education Association:

Ms. Kaplan-Cho testified in support of SB 453. She argued that there are serious safety issues occurring in schools in Connecticut and especially in elementary and pre-kindergarten classrooms. She asserted that teachers and students are experiencing trauma and academic disruption. She questioned why this was occurring and claimed that it could no longer persist, that students and teachers should be safe from physical assault and be in an environment conducive to learning. She believes the bill to be a starting point towards the protection of teachers and students from serious daily incidents.

Marilyn Mathes, Director of Affiliate Services and Member Training for the Connecticut Education Association:

Ms. Mathes testified on behalf of the Connecticut Education Association in support of SB 453. She offered anecdotes from teachers who have experienced aggressive student behavior. She encouraged the Committee to read additional testimonies and urged legislators to support the bill.

Karissa L. Niehoff, ED. D, Executive Director, The Connecticut Association of Schools:

Ms. Niehoff testified on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools in support of SB 453. She stated that the Association especially appreciates the emphasis of the bill on access to school social workers for the benefits it would bring to schools, students and teachers.

Donald E. Williams, Jr., Executive Director, Connecticut Education Association:

Mr. Williams testified on behalf of the Connecticut Education Association in support of SB 453 and made some recommendations. He proposed an amendment “to enhance the response to aggressive or violent behavior by outlining appropriate procedures when behavior poses an imminent threat or danger to students and staff, and follow-up by administrators and staff to address the behavior on an ongoing basis” and another that “would allow a teacher to remove a student from the classroom who has assaulted someone in the classroom, repeatedly bullied other students, or is a threat to the safety of others”.

Diane Alice, Bridgeport Educator:

Ms. Diane testified on SB 453. She argued that this bill will help to keep student safe both in school and in the community. She further stated that it is necessary that students learn to respect authority while in school for them to respect police officers when entering the community.

Miguel Alicea, Retired Educator:

Ms. Miguel testified on SB 453. She argued that “the refusal to fund the necessary resources to help the students is just political expediency to inadequately fund public education”. She claimed that with little budget, it is hard for teachers to appropriately answer to all students’ needs. She stated that the state’s poor support is leading to low teacher morale and high turnover in the profession.

Carl Amato, New Beginnings Educator:

Mr. Amato testified on SB 453. He argued that as an educator, he is experiencing daily disruptive behavior in his classrooms. He further asserted that the reason why test scores do not match with the rest of the world is because of the constant disruptive behavior that goes on in classrooms. Lastly, he claimed that expectations need to change drastically.

Jennifer Babb, Bridgeport Educator:

Ms. Babb testified on SB 453. She argued that, working in an urban district, disruptive behavior has always been an issue. She stated that the consequences are not sufficient for some of the behaviors she witnessed. However, as respects to the bill, she also asserted that taking disruptive behavior seriously will put students at a greater risk if they are not provided with the necessary and additional support staff. Lastly, she claimed that more is to be done both for student and staff.

Jonathan Baine, East Hampton Educator:

Mr. Baine testified on SB 453. He argued that until a teacher is hurt, many administrators do not take the problem seriously or do not provide for the necessary services. He stated that as school behavioral issues worsen, it is hard for teachers to remain in their profession, especially when these unaddressed issues increase the risk of those students to become involved with the criminal justice system in the future.

Denise Baker, Wallingford Educator:

Ms. Baker testified on SB 453. She argued that the administration is not taking the problem seriously enough and fails to provide necessary services and resources, and that risks for students and educators in the classroom are making teachers less motivated to remain in the teaching profession. She also asserted that there are currently no consequences for violent students, and ignoring behavioral issues ultimately increases the risk for these students' involvement with the criminal justice system.

Alexandra, Ballough, Retired Educator:

Ms. Ballough testified on SB 453. She argued that violent students should face immediate consequences as well as professional intervention if needed, and school safety should be a priority for legislators.

Joanna Beernaert, Simsbury Educator:

Ms. Beernaert testified on SB 453. Making a similar statement as those above, she asked for change to protect the state's teachers.

Benjamin Belancik, Waterbury Educator:

Mr. Belancik testified on SB 453. He argued that teachers need to feel safe and not be constantly assaulted by students as such assault is abusive. He also stated that students should face the consequences of their actions so that they can become contributing members of society.

Frances Bellina, Retired Educator:

Ms. Bellina testified on SB 453. She argued that for teachers to teach appropriately, they have to create a safe, supporting and encouraging environment. She asserted that teachers need additional support to handle students who are violent.

Erin Berthold, Wallingford Educator:

Ms. Berthold testified in support of SB 453. As a victim of student assaults, she is greatly in favor of legislation that protects teachers. She argued that in light of gun violence, it is essential to address such issues. She further stated that schools need to be provided with the appropriate resources to curtail disruptive behavior before it gets to the point of violent attacks on educators.

Christine Bialczak, Putnam Educator:

Ms. Bialczak testified on SB 453. She argued that she had to leave her beloved teaching job as her school's director did not believe that students should be disciplined for aggression toward staff. She believes that students should be held accountable for their acts and that adults should acknowledge the problems and set the parameters to help students with disruptive behaviors.

Ava Biffer, East Haddam Educator:

Ms. Biffer testified on SB 453. She argued that bullying is not the only cause of violence and disruption that occurs in classrooms and that other causes need to be dealt with. She stated that the lack of funding for the outplacement of violent students who may have mental health issues or learning problems leads those students to remain in the general population of students, putting teachers and other students at risk. She asserted that hidden costs are to be considered like that of the loss of learning time when classrooms have to be repeatedly cleared when a student becomes violent. However, she made the argument that school districts have no more financial resources to fund such outplacements that can cost more than \$100,000 for each student. As such, she urges the Committee to rectify this problem.

Brenda Bourque, Plainfield Educator:

Ms. Bourque testified on SB 453. She argued that as a teacher in a rural, socio-economically deprived district, she has seen a huge increase in students with violent behaviors even at the elementary level. She stated that schools are not equipped with the appropriate staff and due to the governor's cuts, they have lost their behavior-specific staff. Furthermore, when dealing with violent students, she asserted that it impacts everyone as teachers are required to remove the entire classroom and let the violent student destroy the room. She assessed that as funds are not provided, children with violent behavior remain in regular education classrooms with little or no support other than the classroom teacher. She also claimed that the class makeup has shown the last few years a huge increase in the amount of students with concerning needs such as ADHD, bipolar, autism, learning disabilities, and disruptive, including bullying. She voiced her concerns for her personal safety and claimed that public schools do not have the necessary funding to provide appropriate help to students.

Lisa Bress, Retired Educator:

Ms. Bress testified on SB 453. She argued that as she was teaching in a K-2 school, she witnessed a lot of disruptive behaviors from children. However, she mentioned that she and the school had very little support to deal with such behavioral issues and they were infringing on other students' needs. She further asserted that the decision of the district to decrease the number of classrooms available for children with behavioral and academic needs has contributed to this problem. She affirmed that the school and district administration is not supportive in addressing the behavioral needs in schools. She believes that every student and teacher deserves a safe and stress free environment that is conducive to learning. Lastly, she advocated against the last budget's cuts of paraprofessionals in schools.

Katherine Bunko, Waterbury Educator:

Ms. Bunko testified on SB 453. Sharing her story about her assault by a student, she claimed that her school district ignores any form of violence or assaults on teachers. She asserted that such disengagement leads to bullying and constitutes a risk for teachers and other students. She made the argument that if schools stop the behavior when it starts, they could prevent future incidents from happening.

Joann Calo, Waterbury Educator:

Ms. Calo testified on SB 453. She asserted that, as a teacher for the last fifteen years, she has not seen any improvement with regards to school safety. She claimed that school safety is not addressed by administration at all levels, resulting in no consequences for violent students and in no appropriate interventions for students in need. She argued that it is

imperative to address behavioral issues, especially since not doing so only increases the risks of violent students becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on.

Debra Cassidy, South Windsor Educator:

Ms. Cassidy testified on SB 453. She argued that as a teacher, she has been assaulted by a student and have witnessed verbal and physical abuse of students towards staff or other students without consequences. She asserted that for everyone's sake, students responsible for the conduct of disruptive and violent acts should be held accountable.

Jenna Cercone, CREC Educator:

Ms. Cercone testified on SB 453. She shared her story about her desire to become a teacher to make a difference. She asserted that she has always confronted situations of disruptive behavior from students, which is unjust for the other students deprived of minutes, hours and days of teaching. She argued that schools need more resources to deal with this issue as well as response teams to call when disruptive behaviors occur. Lastly, she noted from her experience that if these types of behaviors are not addressed with the adequate help, they are repeated and in some cases learned by other students for them to repeat.

Danielle Charamut, Manchester Educator:

Ms. Charamut testified on SB 453. She asserted that teacher assault is a major problem where she has observed neither consequences nor appropriate interventions to deal with violent students. She claimed that if teachers are not feeling safe, it is hard to assure students that they are safe.

Kathleen Claprod, Thompson Educator:

Ms. Claprod testified on SB 453. She argued that there are risks to the safety of other students and educators in the classroom especially since the administration is not taking the problem seriously or is not providing the necessary services and resources to deal with the problem at stake. She asserted that there are no consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students. All things considered, she wrote, it leads to the discouragement of teachers to remain in the profession. Lastly, she made the argument that ignoring behavioral issues in schools puts those students at a greater risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on.

Tod Couture, Enfield Educator and President of the Enfield Teachers' Association:

Mr. Couture testified on SB 453. He urged the legislators to protect the teachers and students. He argued that at the primary level, there are about 30 to 50 crisis intervention occurrences, per school, per week. He asserted that even if they have taken measures to deal with the issue, assaults are still occurring on a daily basis and at a rate of 5-6 per day in each of the three buildings of his school.

Susan Cutolo, Stamford Educator:

Ms. Cutolo testified on SB 453. She argued that schools are supposed to be safe and nurturing environments, however teachers are challenged on a daily basis to maintain order and discipline in the classroom. She asserted that more needs to be done to protect teachers and students from violent behaviors.

Laurie Degross, East Hampton Educator:

Ms. Degross testified on SB 453. She stated that she has experienced assault, abuse, and violence from a student and her administrators placed the blame on her, almost causing her to have to fight for her position. She affirmed that administrators do not take the problem seriously and do not support their staff even when teacher assault is still a major problem in schools. She claimed that there are many risks to other students and educators in the classroom.

Janna Deveny, Norwich Educator:

Ms. Deveny testified on SB 453. She argued that a teacher should never be put in a position to be assaulted, no matter the age of the student. She claimed that she has been assaulted and filed a report, but nothing happened. She stated that students with violent behaviors need services that a regular education classroom cannot provide. Lastly, she argued that teachers should be protected.

Susan Devine, Trumbull Educator:

Ms. Devine testified in support of SB 453. She argued that such a bill will help to ensure the classroom safety of educators and their students. As an educator, she has witnessed a lot of incidents. She retold her personal history with bullying, arguing that after such incidents she would never be able to trust that her work place is really safe.

Kate Dias, Manchester High School Math Teacher, President of the Manchester Education Association:

Ms. Dias testified on SB 453. She argued that schools are the only place where all of society's issues collide, and teachers are not prepared or do not have the necessary resources and support to deal with them. She also stated that as president of the teachers' union, she has witnessed a lot of students with disruptive behaviors in classrooms, and that teachers ought to be heard. She further asserted that the issues faced by disruptive children require specialists to address them. Finally she wrote that aggressive behaviors impact not just the environment, but also reduce instructional time and teacher retention, and urged legislators to act to protect students and staff.

Mary-Lynne Dumaine, Plaifield Educator:

Ms. Dumaine testified on SB 453. She asserted that classroom safety should be a top priority, especially in poor towns where the costs associated with the counseling services and direct interventions keep disruptive and violent students in regular education classrooms. She argued that budget cuts have negatively impacted curriculum, supplies and staff.

James Genovese, West Hartford Educator:

Mr. Genovese testified on SB 453. He argued that as a special education educator, he has witnessed disruptive behaviors in classrooms. He further stated that ways to deal with such behaviors are trauma-informed care. However, he also assessed that these programs are costly and school districts do not budget mental health needs. He wrote that it is imperative that processing and restorative justice activities be used to help and teach children about correct behavior.

Judy Goldberg, Vice President of Government Relations for the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association:

Ms. Goldberg testified on behalf of the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association in support of the intent of SB 453 as it includes provisions relating to "daily classroom safety" emphasizing

the reduction of bullying in school. She wrote that they also appreciate the emphasis on access to mental health supports. Lastly, they greatly supported Section 10, requiring schools to notify parents of violations and inviting them to meet with staff support.

Susan Hart, Retired Educator:

Ms. Hart testified in support of SB 453. Narrating her experience witnessing bullying, she made the argument that violence in the school should be addressed.

Patricia Howell, Wilton Educator:

Ms. Howell testified on SB 453. She believes that student assault is in direct correlation to the stress engendered by the school curriculum and the feeling of never feeling successful through the state's Common Core demands. She also argued that stressed teachers lead to stressed students. Lastly, she stated that it is time to give teachers the freedom back to teach.

Jessica Margiotta, Ridgefield Educator:

Ms. Margiotta testified on SB 453. She advocated for the protection of students and teachers in classrooms. She asked for teachers' assaults to be addressed, especially since teachers are never allowed to respond. She claims that like students, teachers have rights; nevertheless, their rights are superseded by the rights of dangerous students.

Faith Mcgurk, Retired Educator, Cynthia Morrissey, Tolland Educator and Edmund Smith, CREC Educator:

Ms. Mcgurk, Ms. Morrissey and Mr. Smith testified on SB 453. They expressed their concerns as to a shortage of teachers in response to disruptive behaviors in classrooms.

Kristen Morehouse, Stonington Educator:

Ms. Morehouse testified on SB 453. She argued that students with serious mental health needs often stay in regular classrooms, which poses a risk to themselves and others. She also stated that bad decisions are made to save money. She recommended the development of protocols that schools systems would have to follow in cases of disruptive and dangerous behavior.

Virginia Ott Crisanti, Bridgeport Educator:

Ms. Ott Crisanti testified on SB 453. She made the argument that it is not that Administration is not taking the problem of disruptive behavior seriously, it is the budget that makes it impossible for the state and cities to provide the services and resources students really need. She argued that risks to the safety of students and teachers are an everyday occurrence. Further, she stated that ignoring behavioral issues in the school now increases the risk of disruptive students becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on.

John Power, Enfield Educator:

Mr. Power testified on SB 453. He argued that teacher assaults are only "a symptom of greater problems in education". He asserted that federal and state legislatures have "tied the hands of school administrators" where teacher assaults have become an increasing reality as a result of state mandates and regulations. Lastly, he asked for laws to protect teachers and recommended that, in the long term, boards of education, administrators and teachers are empowered to be in charge of school again.

Richard Storrs, Hampton Educator:

Mr. Storrs testified on SB 453. He called for the need of appropriate resources and services to deal with disruptive students.

Joanne Tolles, Danbury Educator:

Ms. Tolles testified in support of SB 453. She stipulated that the answer to students' disruptive behavior is not to arm teachers with guns but rather with counselors, nurses, small class sizes and appropriate curriculum.

Christine Van Cott, RHAM Educator:

Ms. Van Cott testified in support of SB 453. Narrating her assault story by a student, she argued for the need of support staff to deal with such behaviors and to protect teachers and other students. She asserted that it is not just an educational issue, "it should be an everyone in the school issue".

Michele Wilcox, Enfield Educator:

Ms. Wilcox testified on SB 453. She described two incidents of physical assault by a student that she experienced while teaching to express her concerns as to the increased incidents of physical aggression towards classmates and school staff by students.

Nancy Wimer, South Windsor Educator:

Ms. Wimer testified in support of SB 453. She described her experience of assault by a student. She further asked: "Hasn't there been enough violence in our schools lately? How badly do teachers and other students need to be hurt before some protection is put in place? Why is a single student allowed to disrupt the learning process of others?"

Group of Educators with similar testimonies:

They testified on SB 453 in support of legislation to protect teachers and students in classrooms, both to guarantee a safe environment conducive to learning and to encourage teachers to stay in the profession. Most of the educators have experienced or witnessed assaults by students and claimed that over their past years of teaching, they noticed an increased level of dangerous student behaviors. All are concerned about the safety of classrooms both for teachers and students, and wrote that they are seeing more and more teachers leaving the profession on a regular basis. They also confirmed that keeping students with emotionally disturbed behaviors in regular education classes is a burden to all; to themselves, to teachers and to other students. They asserted that teachers are leaving their profession as administrations are not taking disruptive behaviors in schools seriously and are not providing the necessary services and resources to address such issues. They agree that if those behaviors are not addressed by professionals and at a young age, such behaviors may worsen, setting children up for failure in society and increasing the risk of them becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

- Vincent Dizenzo, Waterbury Educator
- Mr. Duffek, Retired Educator
- Karen Guianamore, Oxford Educator
- Michelle Gladue, Avon Educator
- Nancy Janis, Naugatuck Educator
- Linda Johansen, East Lyme Educator
- Janice Jones, Manchester Educator

- June Kozloski, Waterbury Educator
- Doreen Lawson, Waterbury Educator
- Mallory Legman, Branford Educator
- Alison Mcweeney, Wallingford Educator
- Christopher Medve, Simsbury Educator
- Rosanne Neri, Retired Educator
- Anna O'Brien, Wallingford Educator
- Donna Pallanti, Retired Educator: She also asked for more funding to schools so that they can initiate interventions for students in need and hire more mental health counselors that are trained in dealing with disruptive students.
- Karen Paparello-Piotrowski, Waterbury Educator
- Margaret Rooney, Redding Educator
- Frances Russell, Bridgeport Educator
- Janet Sagendorf, Waterbury Educator
- Candice Scalice, Bridgeport Educator
- Marie Simoneau, Plainfield Educator
- Kelly Smith, Region 10 Educator
- Ann Szerejko, Portland Educator
- Lisa Tryon, Stratford Educator
- Maureen Wagher, Waterbury Educator
- John Whaley, Fairfield Educator
- Seth Yarish, Norwich Educator

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.:

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education testified on SB 453. They are concerned about the language of the bill, asserting that “daily classroom safety” is not only broad but it would also be impossible to implement at the local or state level. They argued that insuring a “daily classroom safety” is a requirement that is impossible to guarantee. Lastly, they stated that Section 2 of the bill “would also require the establishment of a school safety committee, which is currently permissive. Many districts have utilized their school climate committees to address these issues as part of a comprehensive approach to providing a safe school environment.”

Susan Kelley, Director of the Alliance for Children’s Mental Health:

Ms. Kelley testified on behalf of the Alliance for Children’s Mental Health in opposition to SB 453. She argued that the requirement to identify and report “assault” and “harassment” as part of “school climate” could lead to criminal charges, litigation and to putting more students into the juvenile justice system. She also believes the provision adding mental health services for students having disruptive behaviors to be inappropriate. She asserted that behavioral and mental health services and supports should be available to all children. Furthermore, she made the argument that school climate should not be equated with “classroom safety” and that if state school climate plan language needed statutory revision, it should be to include restorative practices.

Lauren Ruth, Ph. D., Advocacy Director, Karen Siegel, M.P.H., Health Policy Fellow, Camara Stokes Hudson, Associate Policy Fellow, Connecticut Voices for Children:

Ms. Ruth, Ms. Siegel and Ms. Stokes Hudson testified on behalf of the Connecticut Voices for Children in opposition of SB 453. They expressed their concerns as to the subjective nature of the definition of “daily classroom safety”. They believe that the broadness of the definition of “daily classroom safety” will exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities in schools. Second, they expressed concerns as to the use of mental health services. They believe that such use may be seen as a form of punishment.

Kathryn Meyer and Leon Smith, Center for Children’s Advocacy:

Ms. Meyer and Mr. Smith testified on behalf of the Center for Children’s Advocacy in opposition to SB 453. They argued that the bill is repetitive of other legal protections already present in existing statutes. They also believe that the bill curtails parental freedoms to express themselves on all matters relating to their children’s education.

Reported by: Adeline Dubout

Date: April 13, 2018