

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5445

AN ACT CONCERNING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR

Title: EXPELLED STUDENTS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

HB 5445 requires local and regional boards of education to develop and implement a policy regarding the provision of alternative educational opportunities for expelled students instead of requiring the boards' policy conform with recent SBE-issued policy. The bill requires the local boards' alternative educational opportunities to include the following characteristics: (1) A whole student approach, (2) a curriculum aligned with SBE-approved guidelines, (3) high expectations, and (4) research-based practices. Board must submit such policy annually to SDE. The bill eliminates the requirement that local boards must provide alternative education for expelled students that meets the standards adopted by SBE in accordance with state law. The bill repeals the law that required SBE to come up with the standards.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language replaces the language that required SBE to revise its 2017 standards for the provision of an adequate alternative educational opportunity and in doing so eliminate the total number of hours prescribed by the standards.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

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Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner of the Department of Education:

Ms. Wentzell testified on behalf of the Department of Education in opposition to House Bill 5445. She argued that the State Board of Education has already adopted "Standards for Alternative Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled". She stipulated that the Department strongly support the standards already adopted with no further revisions.

Lastly, she asserted that the Department is currently working with the Alternative Schools Committee to develop best practice guidelines to implement the approved standards including the quality of programming.

Sarah Healy Eagan, Child Advocate, State of Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate:

Ms. Eagan testified on behalf of the State of Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate in opposition to House Bill 5445. She argued that it is imperative for expelled students to receive a minimal adequate education for them not to fall behind their peers in school especially since they are the most likely to drop out of school, to be unemployed or to get involved with the juvenile justice system

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), Inc.:

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education testified in support of House Bill 5445. They argued for the guidance related to the quality of provided educational opportunities to students rather than on a specific number of hours.

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

Ms. Goldberg testified on behalf of the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association in support of House Bill 5445. She argued that as learning environments are different for expelled students with a lower teacher-student rate and individualized instruction, the quality of education has a greater impact or importance than a set number of hours.

House Republican Caucus:

The House Republican Caucus testified in support of House Bill 5445. They stipulated that at present, current standards are excessive and onerous both for the student and the town. They suggested that these standards be reviewed and revised so that towns are able to successfully provide a quality education to expelled students and for students to meet the requirements involved with the provision of alternative educational opportunities.

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

Ms. Niehoff testified on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools in support of House Bill 5445. She argued that the bill emphasizes its new standards on the quality of education offered to expelled students. She made the point that as the needs for expelled students are different, multiple support services should be provided. Lastly, she assessed that as the teacher-student ratio is smaller with expelled students, removing required hours allows for a more personalized plan to successfully support their education.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Camara Stokes Hudson, Associate Policy Fellow and Lauren Ruth, Ph.D., Advocacy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children:

Ms. Stokes Hudson and Ms. Ruth testified on behalf of the Connecticut Voices for Children in opposition to House Bill 5445. Mentioning the standards adopted by the State Board of Education, they argued that the removal of such standards will take away some essential

educational supports on which expelled students rely. Undeniably, it will make expelled students fall behind in school having negative consequences on their educational and social development. At the contrary, to encourage the school re-engagement of expelled students, they advocated for a structured education. In addition, they also made the argument that encouraging school re-engagement is essential for expelled students as there are the most likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system.

Lynn B. Cochrane, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Erin R. Shaffer, New Haven Legal Assistance, and Agata Raszcyk-Lawska, Connecticut Legal Services:

Ms. Cochrane, Ms. Shaffer and Ms. Raszcyk-Lawska testified on behalf of Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Heaven Legal Assistance and Connecticut Legal Services in opposition to House Bill 5445. They argued that the removal of such standards would provide expelled students a minimalist education where these students are the most likely to drop out if they are not given a supportive education. They argued that the bill was unnecessary for three reasons. First, the standards already adopted in January aimed at eliminating the isolation and narrow tutoring of expelled students. Second, these standards emphasized on accountability and success with the Individualized Learning Plan aimed at ensuring a successful return to school. Lastly, the Alternative Schools Committee is already committed to providing more standards focused on the quality of education. They further stated that House Bill 5445 negates the work already done and in contrast reduces the requirements for the provision of alternative education to expelled students.

Marisa Halm, J.D., Director, Team Child Juvenile Justice Project – Center for Children’s Advocacy:

Ms. Halm testified on behalf of the Center for Children’s Advocacy in opposition to House Bill 5445. She argued that this bill would reverse the meaningful standards already adopted by the Committee last session. She asserted that the new standards will remove the hours’ requirement while expelled students would need more education rather than less. She further stipulated that the existing standards are both sufficient and effective, providing a “full-time, comprehensive, based on a whole student approach, in alignment with the Common Core, research-based” and they set “a high standard of success for the student regardless of their discipline history”. She assessed that neglecting these standards would be a violation of state constitutional protections. In addition, she made the argument that removing minimum educational requirements for expelled students will set them up for failure, especially when expelled students are disproportionately students of color.

Alliance for Children’s Mental Health:

The Alliance for Children’s Mental health testified in opposition to House Bill 5445. They argued that the bill neglects the standards already adopted by the State Board of Education in Public Act 17-220. They stipulate that the bill will eliminate the number of hours expelled students are supposed to attend as part of their alternative education. Yet, doing so put those very students at risk for not continuing with their education. The organization believes that Connecticut should aim at reducing the number of youth expelled and at improving the quality of education offered to expelled students.

Reported by: Adeline Dubout

Date: April 9, 2018