

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-363

AN ACT CONCERNING A DEFINITION OF IMMUNIZATION RECORDS
RELATED ABSENCE AND ITS EXCLUSION FROM THE CALCULATION OF A

Title: SCHOOL OR DISTRICT'S CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE.

Vote Date: 3/23/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/8/2018

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

SB 363 requires State Board of Education to define "immunization records absence." It specifies that this type of absence does not count as an excused absence, unexcused absence, or disciplinary absence for purposes of reporting truancy. The bill also establishes that such absence should be excluded from the calculation of a school's district chronic absenteeism rate.

Substitute language:

The substitute language removes the language revising the policy that boards of education must follow for truants, namely replacing a required parent meeting with parental contact.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner, State of Connecticut Department of Education:](#)

Commissioner Wentzell testified on behalf of the State Department of Education in opposition to SB 363. She asserted that regardless of the reason why students are not in school, they are losing critical instructional and learning time. She added that immunization records absences take place in the beginning of the school year which is critical to position them for successful learning, and early identification of attendance challenges reveal risks of chronic absence and allow schools to work to ensure children receive immunizations. She stated that the removal of certain absences from required reporting sends a disturbing message that

masking data is more important than encouraging a system of intervention to support students' attendance, and this change also conflicts with federal reporting regulations.

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 support of SB 363 and made some recommendations. She offered additional language for the bill as regards to chronic absenteeism prevention, data collection and response. She argued that children with disabilities are disproportionately represented among students described as "chronically absent". For that matter, the Office of the Child Advocate has made three statutory changes to typically include children with disabilities. She lastly asserted that the Office of Early Childhood was collaborating with the State Department of Education to specifically examine chronic absenteeism and students with disabilities.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS):

Ms. Niehoff testified on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools in support of SB 363. She appreciated that "immunization records absence" would be excluded from calculations of districts' chronic absenteeism rate. She reported having spoken with several principals who report high numbers of students without immunization records or required physicals, and that urban schools are particularly plagued by this issue with many reported absences due to missing medical records. She also suggested expanding the language to include missing health physical forms.

Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Esq., Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA):

Ms. Scheinberg Meyer, Esq. submitted on behalf of the CCA that they support SB 363, and also urged consideration of additional statutory changes. These recommended changes were to specifically require districts to track children with disabilities who are chronically absent, to include a subgroup for children with disabilities amongst those subgroups for whom chronic absenteeism data is already disaggregated, and to require consideration of the unique needs of students with disabilities when identifying effective truancy intervention models.

Center for Children's Advocacy:

The Center for Children's Advocacy testified in support of SB 363 and urged the Committee to consider statutory changes. She proposed amendments to the bill so as to address children with disabilities. First, she proposed to amend Connecticut General Statute §10-198c "to specifically require that school district track children with disabilities who are chronically absent". Second, she proposed to amend Connecticut General Statute §10-198d to include a "subgroup for children with disabilities amongst those subgroups for whom chronic absenteeism data is already disaggregated". Lastly, she proposed to amend Connecticut General Statute §10-198e "to require that, when identifying effective truancy intervention models for implementation by local and regional boards of education, the State Department of Education consider the unique needs of students with disabilities".

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Erica Bromley, Juvenile Justice Liaison for the Connecticut Youth Services Association, Member of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee and Co-Chair of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee Diversion Workgroup:

Ms. Bromley testified on behalf of the Connecticut Youth Services Association in opposition to SB 363. She argued that she was particularly in disfavor of Section 3, subsection (b) regarding Procedures and Policies Concerning Truants as this section removes the requirement for a school to meet with the parent/guardian when the student is truant, instead allowing for mere “contact”. Nevertheless, she does not believe that this simple contact will engage discussion and be problem-solving. She further argued that, for schools to bring cases to the Youth Service Bureaus, they are required to have a signed referral form from the parent/guardian of the truant student. However, she asserted that if the section mentioned above does not encourage more contact with parent/guardian, referral forms will not be signed and referrals will not be made to the Youth Service Bureaus. She made the statement that “Engagement is key to success. You cannot succeed if you are not engaged and part of the process”.

Reported by: Edward Waters, Asst. Clerk

Date: 4/9/18