

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-456

AN ACT CONCERNING ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT ENROLL STUDENTS FROM PUERTO RICO WHO HAVE BEEN DISPLACED

Title: BY HURRICANE MARIA.

Vote Date: 3/19/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following Joint Favorable Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Juan R. Candelaria, 95th Dist.

Rep. Noreen S. Kokoruda, 101st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for this SB 456 is to provide schools with the option to share classrooms and resources in order to educate recently displaced students from the natural disaster in Puerto Rico for the 2018 and 2019 school years.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education in the State of Connecticut:

Commissioner Wentzell is not in support of SB 456 in its current state. She believes that SB 456 is unnecessary, as schools are already free to make these agreements with other schools on their own. However, Wentzell is in support of the intent of SB 456, but if it is to be passed it should include the other areas impacted by Hurricane Maria an example being the U.S Virgin Islands.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Martin M Looney, President Pro Tempore of the Senate:

Senator Looney submitted testimony in support of SB 456. He referenced the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which ensures that "Educational protections are in place for children and youth who have lost their homes due to natural disasters". Furthermore, Looney advocated for the schools that have had to accept more students than originally anticipated, urging an increase in funding for those areas. Senator Looney also acknowledged that this is a great opportunity have schools cooperate with each other in order to provide for the common good of the students.

Sal Escobales, President, New Britain Federation of Teachers:

Mr. Escobales, who spoke on behalf of the New Britain Federation of Teachers, provided comments on SB 456. First, Escobales urged that in the wake of the disaster, New Britain Schools are facing financial problems due to the overwhelming population of Puerto Rican students. Escobales requested that the New Britain school system receive financial aid so that they could provide a quality education to all returning students, as well as the students who just migrated from Puerto Rico in order to flee from the disaster. This funding would allow the schools to hire Spanish speaking staff members, for the students that do not speak English. The school district also needs to provide more counseling opportunities for students who experienced emotional trauma during the natural disaster. They project their financial need being a total of \$2,343,671. This is because the 181 regular education students from Puerto Rico will need \$1,412,832 in funding (181 students x \$11,151 = \$2,018,331 x 70% of year = \$1,412,832). Also, the 53 special education students will require an additional \$930,839 in funding (53 students x \$25,090 = \$1,329,770 x 70% of year = \$ 930,839).

Daniel C. Giungi, Senior Legislative Associate, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:

Mr. Giungi testified on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), testified in favor of SB 456. In his testimony, Giungi justified his support arguing that it would allow school districts to leverage resources between different communities. It would also allow for the incoming Puerto Rican students to be provided an education that they deserve, in an environment that promotes learning.

Neil M. O’Leary, Mayor of the City of Waterbury:

Mayor O’Leary testified in support of SB 456, providing in his testimony statistics from the City of Waterbury. After the disaster, the state enrolled 1,745 displaced students, with Waterbury receiving 299 of the students. This created classroom overflows, for example, in the elementary school level 20 classrooms are enrolled over the contractually allowed limit. Many more classrooms on the elementary level are enrolled with the maximum number of students. This does not create an environment conducive to learning. If SB 456 was passed it would allow schools to work together to meet the education needs of the newly enrolled Puerto Rican students, providing them with the education that they deserve.

Ray Rossmando, Policy, Research, and Government Relations Director, Connecticut Education Association:

Mr. Rossmando submitted testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), provided commentary in support of SB 456. Rossmando urges the legislature to consider the additional needs of the 263 students displaced Puerto Rican students that New Britain has enrolled when making their decisions. 181 regular education students from Puerto Rico will need \$1,412,832 in funding (181 students x \$11,151 = \$2,018,331 x 70% of year = \$1,412,832). Also, the 53 special education students will require an additional \$930,839 in funding (53 students x \$25,090 = \$1,329,770 x 70% of year = \$ 930,839). This will encompass the need for English Language Assistance, access to social workers, and additional daily needs.

Paul G. Salina, Chief Operations Officer, Consolidated School District of New Britain:

Mr. Salina supported SB 456 and sees this as a vital piece of legislation for the New Britain School District. The school system in New Britain is already working with a deficit budget, due to prior funding cuts. With the second highest amount of enrolled displaced students, schools in New Britain are struggling to hire additional staff and create additional classrooms. The schools are looking to the state to provide additional funding for the extra resources.

Erin E. Stewart, Mayor of the City of New Britain:

Mayor Stewart testified in support of SB 456 but remained cautious in her comments. While Stewart agrees that the schools need to work in cooperation with one another to help the students, it may not be enough. The problems that the City of New Britain is facing are for the most part monetary, having to absorb an extra \$1 million in educational costs. With the enrollment of more than 200 students, they will have to create new classroom spaces and hire new staff to benefit the incoming students.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Reported by: Hannah Ellis

Date: March 28, 2018