

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7215

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE POLICIES.

Vote Date: 3/7/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/5/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Committee on Children

REASONS FOR BILL:

To mandate local and regional boards of education to evaluate school climate. To require the State Department of Education to construct an instrument that evaluates social emotional learning. To outline the duties of a safe school climate coordinator. To mandate local and regional boards of education to enact a social and emotional learning and school climate council that replaces the existing safe school climate committee. To mandate the State Department of Education to establish a model safe school climate policy. To mandate local and regional boards of education to administer training on the prevention of and intervention in discrimination against the harassment of students.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:

This organization supports the bill, however it wishes to see amended language. CCM is concerned that this bill will place mandates on municipalities for which there is no funding. Furthermore, the organization is concerned that this bill will duplicate efforts to fix this issue as some municipalities have already established plans on how to combat the issue. Lastly, they urge the committee to obtain a fiscal analysis report on the impact of this bill, and to hold the bill until it is further evaluated.

Subira Gordon, Executive Director ConnCan:

Subira expressed her support for this bill, but requests an amendment. She believes that incorporating social emotional learning strategies will have positive impacts on children. However, she believes that the language should be strengthened to ensure that there is no bias against any student or subgroup.

Glenn Lungarini, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Schools- CT Interscholastic Athletic Conference:

Glenn expressed his support for this bill with amended language. Glenn mentioned that some terms are too vague thus creating confusion for the reader. In addition, he is concerned that some terms may infringe upon the student's first amendment rights. Glenn also mentioned that some terms are subjective which can result in problems with implementation. He suggests that legislators take some time to revise these terms before action is taken on this bill.

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents:

Fran expresses her support for this bill with proposed amendments. She mentioned that the language of this bill can lead to wide interpretations, and the fiscal impact of this bill should be studied further before action is taken. She acknowledged that social emotional learning is important in education, but expressed concerns that this bill is an unnecessary replacement of bullying legislation currently in place.

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

Ray expressed his support for this bill. He mentioned that he supports the bill's emphasis on trauma-informed strategies, restorative practices, and social emotional development. However, he also mentioned that amendments should be made to the bill. These amendments should include specific acts to the definition of bullying, a larger emphasis on school climate, and the inclusion of teacher discussions and decisions in school climate debates.

Diane Willcutts, Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut:

Diane supports this bill with amended language. She is concerned that school administrators will unfairly punish children with disabilities for instances of bullying. In addition, another concern is that this bill if passed would provide broad immunities to school personnel. Lastly, the organization is concerned about the dangers of student confidentiality since this bill makes information readily available.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education:

The association expressed its opposition to the bill. It was mentioned in the testimony submitted that although it supports social emotional learning, there are not enough resources to implement the council that this bill calls for. In addition, the association is concerned that the legislation will cause school boards and administrators to shift their focus from prioritizing a safe school climate to revising policies, regulations and procedures. Lastly, the association is concerned that the language in this bill is too broad and thus actions that are common among students might be considered dangerous thus prompting intervention to occur.

Kathleen Flaherty, Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project:

Kathleen expressed her opposition to this bill. Kathleen mentioned that this bill aims to resolve multiple issues which make it very confusing for school administrators who would have to implement this policy. In addition she is concerned that the vague language of this bill will result in a disproportionate impact on students of color.

Susan Kelley, Director of Advocacy and Policy, National Alliance on Mental Illness Connecticut:

Susan strongly opposes this bill. She mentioned that the bill is unnecessarily long which can make it very confusing for school administrators to implement it. In addition, she mentioned that some of the language is very vague which can result in disproportionate impact on students of color. Susan is also concerned that some of the language in this bill goes against the state's juvenile justice reforms over the past years. She mentioned that there is a lack of consistency in the language of this bill which can have negative impacts on children if it is administered in such way.

Agata Raszczyk-Lawska Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services:

Agata expressed her opposition to this bill. Although she acknowledged that social emotional learning is important, she believes the language of the bill is confusing. The bill also does not provide room for student involvement, and does not provide a process that protects children's' due process rights. She mentioned that the bill lacks data reported by all relevant stakeholders, and does not place a strong emphasis on full scale participation by staff and students with the training needed to implement these policies.

Reported by: Dea Ballij

Date: 03/13/2019