

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7313

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS STUDENTS' ACCESS TO EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/15/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/13/2019

File No.: 154

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would give establish accessibility and an age appropriate process for homeless children's disputes with boards of education regarding immediate school enrollment. This bill addresses the need to put Connecticut state laws for homeless youth protections and rights in line with the federal rules of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

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

Ms. Eagan supports this bill. In two-thousand sixteen OFA did a review of the registration requirements of students to enroll in Connecticut school districts. OFA found that schools were requiring birth certificates, state issued identification, drivers licenses, or a social security number. All of these things are not in accordance with the laws outlined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. These barriers to entry discourage undocumented students and homeless students from enrolling in school. In the academic year of twenty-seventeen to twenty-eighteen OFA estimates there were five thousand fifteen students who were homeless. Students should not face barriers to accessing education; this bill would fix this problem.

Commissioner, Dianna Wentzell, State of Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE):

SDE supports this bill with one concern. The effort to codify the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in state statute, SDE fully supports. SDE's one concern is a section of this bill which is not part of the federal statutes. In this bill the party claiming ineligibility due to a student not being a resident of the school district would no longer put the burden of proof on

the student. Conversely, the school district would take on the burden of proof in claiming a student's ineligibility due to not living in the school district. SDE's concern is that the consequence of this language could result in the undue surveillance of a homeless youth by the school district to meet their burden of proof.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Executive Director, Abby Anderson, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance:

Director Anderson supports this bill. Director Anderson states that this bill would allow children an opportunity to get in touch with a homeless liaison and make the process of homeless children applying for homeless status more transparent and understandable for young people. Schooling is a major support system for many juveniles and may help keep them out of prison.

CEO, Cho Richard, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness:

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness supports this bill. This bill would put Connecticut statutes in line with the federal McKinney-Vento Act. Currently, there is inconsistent enforcement of the McKinney-Vento Act between municipalities and this bill would rectify this problem. Twenty-seven percent of homeless people between the ages of eighteen to twenty-four do not have a high school degree or a GED and homeless high school students tend to drop out or are rejected from attending high school. For students suffering homelessness, school is an essential support system.

CT's Legal Services Program, Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA), Connecticut Legal Services (CLS), New Haven Legal Assistance (LAA):

GHLA, CLS, LAA support this bill. This bill would codify key educational protections for homeless students. The McKinney-Vento Act has been in effect since nineteen eighty-seven, but it is not adhered to like it should be. Very few school offices have the McKinney Vento Rights available to the public, and many times receptionists and social workers fail to inform students and parents of their rights. In effect, some homeless children are denied from school and their rights are violated.

Executive Director, Kathleen Flaherty, Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.:

Ms. Flaherty supports this bill. This bill would clarify the legal responsibility school districts, superintendents, and boards of education have to homeless students. For homeless students schools are a refuge and a resource and this bill would reinforce their right to be there.

Natalie Garcia, the Youth Action Hub:

Ms. Garcia supports this bill. The Youth Action Hub is advocacy group of people who have first-handedly experienced housing instability and use their experiences to help those currently experiencing housing instability. Connecticut's education laws do not align with Federal laws. Not being immediately enrolled in school affects a student's future financial potential and their mental health. School support is key; one teacher can make a positive difference for homeless kids.

Director, Patricia Julianelle, School House Connection:

This bill would put Connecticut in compliance with the McKinney-Vento act. The McKinney-Vento act gives clear responsibilities to local education agencies to grant protections for homeless children enrolling in school, but it also requires that each state develop its own plan

for the implementation of these protections in disputes between homeless children and local school districts. This bill would put Connecticut in compliance with recent changes to the McKinney-Vento Act known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which strengthens the rights of unaccompanied homeless youths.

Chair, Stacey Violante Cote, Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Workgroup, Center for Children's Advocacy:

Chairman Cote supports this bill. The issue of homeless student enrollment protections is plentiful in Federal statute, but is scarcely observed or known by Connecticut's education districts. This bill would be a clear reminder that these rights exist. Homeless student disproportionately are special education students, school drop outs, were told they may no longer attend school due to the homeless status, more likely to be forced to exchange sex for basic necessities, been through DCF, been through foster care, been incarcerated, reported living in unsafe environments, and unemployed. For homeless students, school is their only safe place and this bill would protect their right to be there.

Director of Policy and Advocacy, Susan R. Kelly, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH):

Director Kelly supports this bill. Director Kelly states that this bill would improve the lives of homeless youth by allowing access to school as a major support system. Without school homosexual youth are especially vulnerable to poor behavioral health. Without a support system, homeless youth are more likely to drop out altogether and not seek support. Too often McKinney-Vento laws are not enforced solely due to ignorance. Current Connecticut statutes do not have sufficient protections for homeless youth. Getting these youth in school diversion programs and interventions reduces the risk that they will enter the juvenile justice system.

Jessica Nelson, Connecticut Voices for Children:

Ms. Nelson supports this bill. Ms. Nelson states that there are one thousand two hundred fifty identified homeless youth in Connecticut, but there are likely far more unidentified homeless youth in Connecticut. Missing class time negatively affects a student's grades and personal relationships, if students lose their home and are relocated, they should not have their educational continuity disrupted by being forced to relocate schools and going through arduous disputes with Boards of Education.

Policy Analyst, Kayleigh Pratt, Partnership for Strong Communities:

Ms. Pratt supports this bill. Last year homelessness increased by four thousand four hundred eighty-seven people and the year before that is increased by three thousand seven hundred fifty nine people. A Yale survey study found that homeless youth saw school as their primary source of support. This bill creates predictability and clarity between Connecticut statute and federal law regarding the rights and procedural protections which homeless youth are entitled to.

Special Projects Program Manager, Caitlin Rose, NewReach:

Ms. Rose supports this bill. In her experience, Ms. Rose has seen many homeless youth fall through the cracks primarily because of the underfunded and uncoordinated McKinney-Vento system. Although Ms. Rose is not requesting funding of this program, she recognizes that this bill takes the right steps in making sure that homeless youth are getting into intervention through the school system more efficiently.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None.

Reported by: Colin Carroll

Date: 3/22/19