Bill No.: SB-1017
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPEN CHOICE PROGRAM.
Vote Date: 3/15/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/13/2019
File No.: 332

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill would allow Open Choice districts to re-allocate their grant funding to create an Education Advocate position. This advocate would help facilitate the transition of students into a new school. Students face many social and academic challenges when starting a new school and this position would support them and their families through a difficult transition.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education: Although the Department acknowledges the value of creating these positions to aid in the Open Choice Program, they cannot support the proposal due to fiscal concerns. The Department feels that without additional funding, the proposal is impractical and the funds are better spent on individual needs and student populations.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director, Education Reform Now (ERN): ERN supports this bill but would also like to urge the committee to expand the Open Choice program statewide.

Jessica Nelson, Connecticut Voices for Children: CT Voices for Children support this bill, but would like to see it go further. They testify to the need of transitional support for students entering a new school. They would like to also see the education advocate demonstrate racial consciousness, have knowledge of implicit biases and use culturally relevant practices.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO): CASBO is supportive of the Open Choice program and the idea behind this bill, they have fiscal concerns. They believe this would be another unfunded mandate and it would prove difficult to create such a position within existing grant allocations.

William S Hoff, Business Manager, Suffield Public Schools: Mr. Hoff does not support this bill. He does not believe that hiring an education advocate is the best approach for every district, and funds could be better spent on direct resources such as a school psychologist or a social worker. Without an increase in funding, he is concerned this mandate will result in less Open Choice participation.

Theresa D. Yonsky, Director of Fiscal Services, Bethel Public Schools: Ms. Yonsky shares her fiscal concerns with this bill. She says their proposed budget has already been reduced and they already have needs to hire two more educators to meet new state requirements. She believes these new educator hires are of more critical importance than an education advocate.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin Date: 4/3/2019