

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-2

AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND  
**Title:** EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

**Vote Date:** 3/15/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/9/2021

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.  
Sen. Bob Duff, 25th Dist.  
Sen. Douglas McCrory, 2nd Dist.  
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.  
Sen. Steve Cassano, 4th Dist.  
Sen. Derek Slap, 5th Dist.  
Sen. Matthew L. Lesser, 9th Dist.  
Sen. Gary A. Winfield, 10th Dist.  
Sen. Mary Daugherty Abrams, 13th Dist.  
Sen. Jorge Cabrera, 17th Dist.  
Sen. Marilyn V. Moore, 22nd Dist.  
Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.  
Sen. Will Haskell, 26th Dist.  
Sen. Mae Flexer, 29th Dist.  
Sen. Alex Kasser, 36th Dist.  
Sen. Dennis A. Bradley, 23rd Dist.  
Rep. Christine Conley, 40th Dist.  
Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.  
Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.  
Rep. Amy Morrin Bello, 28th Dist.  
Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill ensures the safety, education and social equity of the children of Connecticut through the amendment of 17 statutes that touch upon different areas of a child's life in response to the covid-19 pandemic.

On line 51 language is added to add a training approved by the Commissioner of Public Health.

On line 72 language is added to give the timeframe of two hours for the training added to line 51.

On line 80 language is added because the Commissioner of Public Health can approve a qualified course.

On line 97 guidelines for a licensure renewal are established.

On line 167 language is added to provide a minimum time frame for specialized training in understanding and responding to challenging behaviors related to physical, psychiatric, psychosocial and cognitive disorders.

On line 180 language is added to provide a minimum time frame for the training added on line 167.

On line 197 language is added to provide a minimum timeframe for continuing education requirements.

On line 229 language is added to provide a minimum time frame for continuing education for an emergency medical responder, emergency medical technician or advanced emergency medical technician.

On line 270 language is added in order to provide a minimum time frame for continuing education and teaching activity requirements.

On lines 310-317 language is added a few times for organizational purposes of the document.

On lines 318-330 language is removed and replaced with language that allows a minor to request/receive as many outpatient mental health treatment sessions as necessary without the consent or notification of a parent or guardian.

On line 337 language is added in order to establish guidelines for a provider to notify a parent or guardian.

On line 387 language is added in order to integrate the principles and practices of social-emotional learning in the program.

On lines 411-420 language is removed and added for organizational purposes of the document.

On line 435 language is added for the integration of principles and practices of social-emotional learning in the program.

On lines 459 and 474 language is added in order to create a series of requirements for the policies and procedures described on the previous item.

On line 524 language is added in order to include remote class sessions as school attendance.

On line 541 language is added to amend the definitions of "excused absence" and "unexcused absence" to exclude parts of their definitions.

On line 557 language is added in order to define "adverse childhood experience".

On line 603 language is added in order to add data collected concerning adverse childhood experiences suffered by students to the examinations required by the state.

On line 708 language is added in order to add adverse childhood experiences to the school profile submitted to the regional board of education.

On line 743 language is added to explain that in case of a pandemic, the child will be provided with opportunities through a virtual platform in lieu of visitation.

On line 755 language is added to explain that the commissioner will ensure the opportunities of a child to communicate with such child's parents.

On line 776 language is added to convey that a commissioner can develop a policy that requires the temporary cessation of in-person visitation if a child or such child's parent or sibling is seriously ill.

On line 817 language is added in order to give a timeframe for the Commissioner to expand the operation of the telephone Careline.

On line 857 language is added to add similar services that are appropriate for children who are four and five years of age to the Birth to Five program.

On line 1005 language is added to include 4 and 5 year olds in the old Birth to Three program.

On line 1124 language is added to explain that the commissioner shall not charge a fee for early intervention services to the parents or legal guardians of eligible children.

On line 1127 language is added in order to explain that the recipient of an early intervention service will be held harmless of the monetary impact of the intervention.

On line 1183 language is added to include young children in the new Birth to five program.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Acting Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker:** The Commissioner has some comments for the bill:

- Sections 11-13: Even though the Commissioner is in favor of these resources, without additional resources, this could easily turn into a burden to local districts.
- Section 14: The requirements for assessing a students' safety or hardships to teachers is redundant because they are mandated reporters already.
- Sections 16 and 17: The Commissioner suggests "as an alternative either that the legislature direct a committee (that includes the Department) to study and propose universal remote learning standards, or to permit the Commissioner of Education to develop universal implementing rules in lieu of providing permission." The department proposes the following language:
  - "Instruction that is conducted on a virtual platform or as part of a remote learning model shall be considered an actual school session, provided that such provision of education is consistent with standards developed by the Commissioner of Education for such instruction. The Commissioner of Education shall develop, and may revise as necessary, such standards for local and regional boards of education to provide instruction that is conducted on a virtual platform or as part of a remote learning model which when complied with shall be considered an actual school session. The remote learning standards shall not be deemed to be regulations, as defined in section 4-166."
- The Commissioner also requests that "the mandate that a local board specify requirements for remote student attendance must also direct the local board to make such a policy in line with the State Board of Education policy and guidelines issued by the Department on this topic."
- Section 18: The department does not support the determination that virtual classes presence or absence would not be counted towards traditional student attendance data. "If the school is offering remote learning and the student is absent, then it needs to be categorized as an excused-remote or an unexcused- remote per our guidance." In addition, "this section also refers to Section 21 related to mental health wellness days, but appears to be referencing Section 19". Lastly, there is no need for additional legislation regarding absences for mental health since the current legislation already allows for 9 absence days regardless if it is due physical or mental health.
- Section 19: The department states that allowing a student to remain home "does not necessarily achieve the outcome of improving the student's well-being", the schools are equipped with

tools to help students facing mental health issues as well as their families. In addition, their mental health might not be known if they are not in school. Schools must know when students are present in person and within school borders.

- Section 20: This is not information that is currently collected by the Department and additional resources would be needed. It is important to keep in mind the retraumatization of students who would need to talk about moments of violence. The department believes that before causing such trauma, a task force should be convened “to study this issue and develop recommendations for moving forward without causing further unintended trauma.”
- Section 25 (and related conforming changes): The Commissioner is in support of the testimony submitted by the Office of Early Childhood and moving forwards would like to ensure any proposals will be consistent with the requirements set by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Section 44: “This is duplicative and funding for this program is not included in the Governor’s recommended budget.” Further, CT is already investing in providing internet to its students, the Commissioner believes a comprehensive systems approach is best. Lastly, the annual reporting requirement is redundant.

**Acting Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford:** The DPH testified in support of this bill. However, the department would like to bring some concerns regarding the language in the following sections:

- Sections 2-9: “DPH does not currently approve programs related to CEUs, as we do not have the resources or expertise to review continuing education programs.” “The Department respectfully requests being removed as the entity to “approve” courses.”
- Section 2: “Physician assistants do not currently have to complete CEUs. We suggest that the committee should create similar language as found in Section 5 of the bill to outline the new requirements for CEUs for physician assistants.”
- The department recommends inserting the following language in Section 5:
  - In line 120 of the bill add the words “actively practicing in this state” after the word “statutes”. This will remove the CEU requirement for individuals such as retired nurses still holding a license, or nurses who holds a license in many states but are not practicing in Connecticut.
  - Inline135, the language states that the Commissioner may waive up to “ten” CEUs for nurses. However, nurses are not currently required to complete CEUs upon renewal of their license. The language in the bill mandates nurses to take a minimum of two CEUs, which would satisfy the whole CEU requirement for nurses. The Department respectfully requests the Committee take into consideration changing the word “ten” to “two”.
- Section 6: “This bill appears to be focused on the well-being of children, and typically a nurse aide would not provide services to children within their current scope of practice. The definition of a nurse aide in Connecticut’s statutes is an individual that is providing nursing or nursing- related services to residents in a nursing home setting.”

- Section 9: “The language in the bill would require AEMTs to take the behavioral health training twice. The department respectfully request removing this duplicative requirement for AEMTs.”

**Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes, Department of Children and Families:** She is overall support of the bill but is opposed to the following sections:

- Section 23: “Given the reporting requirements associated with making a referral of abuse or neglect, this is an impractical and inefficient solution. The Department requires significant information to determine if a referral meets acceptance criteria, a requirement that could not be met within the unstructured platform of a text message.”
- Section 24: the language is vague and the terms “removal meeting” is overly broad.
- Section 45: A task force is created but the DCF is not included as a member.

The Commissioner asks the committee to: “refer to the CT Children's Behavioral Health Plan, which includes several ideas to improve behavioral and mental health services for all children and their families, including those committed to DCF.”

**Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood:** The Commissioner states that the Birth to Three programs falls under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Further “a Preschool Education Working Group was convened to discuss the challenges in transitioning children from Birth to Three to special education services provided by public school.” The recommendations are:

- Require an ASQ be completed for students found not eligible for Part B.
- Encourage all communities to create an early childhood liaison position.
- Consider additional data collection for monitoring children found not eligible for Part B services.
- Monitor collaboration between community-based programs and LEAs specifically about referrals of children who had received Birth to Three and found not eligible for Part B services.
- Allow families who have children turning 3 in the months from May to August to choose to remain in their current Birth to Three programs until the start of the following school year or receive services from the LEA through Part B. This would require additional fiscal resources.

The Commissioner believes these recommendations should be the place to start.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Mary Yordon, AFTCT Divisional Vice President and President Norwalk Federation of Teachers:** The Federation testified in support of this bill. Mary Yordon said that schools have been dealing with every single side effect of the pandemic and it is time for such a study at this time. She requests the following changes:

- Educators are not trained to assess a student’s safety in their homes during the pandemic, therefore the Federation requested this provision to be removed. The educators take very

seriously the duty of being mandated reporters but there is also no mention of standards to be used in this safety assessment.

- The Federation supports the creation of mental health awareness days but requests the inclusion of the word non-consecutive in order to limit the negative impact on the instructional program.

**Grace Whittington:** Grace testified in favor of this bill. She points out the benefits of this bill by mentioning that the rate of teen suicides has increased due to lack of in person interaction. In addition, she mentions that this bill addresses the socioeconomic and racial inequality in Connecticut's schools in regards to proper mental health resources. According to the CT School & State Finance Report there is a \$639 million funding gap between public schools with BIPOC over 25% and public schools with white population greater than 75%. She states that SB-2 will ensure students the means to cope with covid losses.

**Dr. Jessica Welt, and I am a licensed psychologist and the CEO and Clinical Director of the Child Guidance Center of Southern CT (CGC):** The Center testified in support of this bill. Dr. Welt mentions the statistics that mental health visits increased significantly for young children and 6.7% of high school teenagers have attempted suicide, with that she points out that youth suicide prevention must be prioritized. She believes that “[e]stablishing a statewide youth suicide prevention program and training community members in QPR are excellent ways to accomplish this and ensure that all children in the state are surrounded by a suicide safety net in their community.”

**Christopher Trombly, faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at Southern Connecticut State University:** Christopher Trombly testified in support of this bill. He stated that the state has relied too strongly on schools to do very essential jobs to society while “equipping them with too few resources with which to undertake that work.” He also states that Connecticut is in the top 5 states for both per capita income, and income inequality.

**Howard Sovronsky, Chief Behavioral Health Officer at Connecticut Children's Medical Center:** The Center testified in support of this bill. Howard Sovronsky stated that the center encourages “state leaders to support the creation of a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable behavioral health ecosystem for all children that can be readily accessed when and how they need it.” The CT Children's Medical Center scans all children above 10 years old for risk of suicide, and since October 2020 the number of children testing positive has increased around 20% each month. Thought he agrees with most of the bill, he suggests a few additional thoughts:

- “I would encourage that any list of resources be specific to certain regions or communities.” and these lists should be updated frequently.
- Ensure that one of the tenets of the task force (healthy lifestyle) includes not only physical health but also mental health.

**Senate Democrats:** The democrats testified in support of this bill. The democrats are in strong support of this bill and its goals. Their testimony highlighted many of the benefits coming directly from this bill including how this bill will give access to “powerful resources, tools, and supports” to schools.

**Olivia Brooke Sally:** Olivia testified in support of this bill. She stated that she sees the daily struggles of her two little sisters, and she believes that by passing this bill a significant step towards improving the social-emotional and educational outcomes of all students in CT.

**Daniel Pearson, State Director for Educators for Excellence-Connecticut:** Daniel Pearson testified in favor of this bill. He states that this pandemic has shined a light on the inequities of the educational system and how much the covid-19 pandemic has already impacted education, he proceeds to list many options of programs for a long term plan to address structural flaws of the system. He recommends:

- “adding the recommendations provided to you by ConnCAN on clearly defining student engagement and disengagement” to create “a uniform set of guidelines for virtual learning and ensure we invest in professional development for our teachers focused on remote teaching”

**Emma Morelli, legal intern at the Center for Children’s Advocacy and a student at UCONN School of Law:** Emma has testified in support of this bill. She stated that according to the American Psychological Association suicide has historically been the second leading cause of death among teenagers, and even though the amount Emergency Room trips has lowered during the pandemic, the amount of mental health cases among the youth has increased. She states that this increase is partially to the resources that could not be used during the pandemic for mental health support and with this bill aiming to create a task force to address this issue, she is fully supporting it.

**Tara McNeil:** Tara testified in favor of this bill. She mentions how heartbroken she is by seeing families having to decide if they can or cannot afford services that are available for their child with a developmental delay, being that these services ensure a smooth transition to public schools. From her personal experience she believes the program “Birth to three” should be available to all of CT residents no matter the cost.

**Sarah McKinnis, Yale College Democrats:** Sarah testified in favor of this bill. She brought up the points that teen suicide rates have been increasing and that by having the state mandate mental health training this will allow for a more equitable approach to mental health in CT as a whole. She believes that “[p]assing this bill would be a crucial step in addressing and improving the social-emotional and educational outcomes of all students in the state.”

**Andrew McKinnis, student in Fairfield:** Andrew testified in support of this bill. He mentions how he saw firsthand how the suicide rate increase affected teenagers when he heard about a Junior at Fairfield Warde High School, who committed suicide in early February 2021. He believes that mental health days are extremely necessary for the wellbeing of a student.

**Kyle Mayer, Yale Democrats:** Kyle testified in support of this bill. He states that the suicide rates are raising at dramatic rates and mentions an example of Tennessee after its state-mandate took place, he said that “over 42% of participants identified at least one at-risk youth and intervened within 6 months after taking the course (QPR).” By having the state require this training, this would benefit enormously schools who do not have an extensive budget to hire many mental health professionals. Further, “[a]n Internet access grant program, as devised by SB 2, would ensure that future students can get internet access, too.”

**Isabella Marin, resident of New Haven:** Isabella testified in support of this bill. She brought up some statistics regarding the increase in teen suicide rates since the pandemic has begun as well as the funding gap between public school with the majority of white students compared to a public school with a majority of BIPOC for mental health resources. Lastly, she states that “[f]unding data shows that lower-income students and students of color are disproportionately impacted by the current lack of mental health access in schools.”

**Eric Linh, resident of New Haven:** Eric testified in support of this bill. He states the benefits of being able to attend parent-teacher conferences remotely as well of the more than six mental health days allowed without the consent of a parent or guardian. He talks about his own experience with his own deteriorating mental health.

**Valerie Lepoutre, Manager of Peer Initiatives, Education & Training NAMI Connecticut:** Valerie testified in support of this bill. She explained how NAMI is the biggest organization in the fight against teen suicide.

- She believes it is “necessary to establish a robust youth suicide prevention training program.”
- She also asks the committee to consider “utilizing the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) model for both licensed health care professionals and professionals working in the school system.”

**Nicole Kliegl:** Nicole testified in support of this bill. She stated that she “fully support[s] Committee Bill 2, regarding young children, mental health services, in the expansion of the birth to three program to include four and five-year-old.”

**Cindy Jackson, Birth to Three provider and Chair of the Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC):** Cindy testified in favor of this bill. She is aware of the fiscal implication adding two years to the program will have, she believes that adding children with birthdays only between May and August will have a smaller fiscal impact. She saw parents that were able to see their kids learning through the pandemic due to this program as well. She also mentioned how much the B23 feels can be very heavy on middle class families and the funding by the program is what allowed their kids to continue learning especially in a time when many people lost their jobs.

**Susan I. Hamilton, Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection for the Office of the Chief Public Defender:** Susan testified in favor of this bill but has some comments. She states that:

- In section 22 “administrative discretion vested solely in the Commissioner under these circumstances is overly broad and should, consistent with existing law, require a court order unless the Governor has declared a public health emergency *and* issued an Emergency Executive Order authorizing the suspension of this requirement.” The new language is also unnecessary.
- In section 24 regarding the DCF’s Considered Removal Meetings the DPDS would like to “propose a friendly amendment requiring that the any such meeting notice provided to the parent also be provided to the parent’s and the child(ren)’s attorneys, if any.”

**Josh Guo, Yale Democrats:** Josh testified in favor of this bill. He stated that the pandemic exacerbated the already existing inequities of the state of CT both regarding distribution of technology as well in the distribution of mental health resources, and this bill seeks to fix both issues.

**Robert Goodrich, Executive Director of RACCE and member of the Coalition for Equity In Learning (C4EL):** Robert testified in support of this bill. In his opinion, the two “dilemmas that are prolonging the creation of solutions for student disengagement and learning loss, especially solutions that would be culturally responsive:”

- “The lack of qualitative data being collected for student experience in schools”

- “The absence of a metric to measure levels of student engagement through the lens of school connectedness”

The coalition believes that student engagement should be prioritized as much or more than attendance. Therefore, he recommends an amendment:

- “Currently Sec. 20 does not contain a definition of student engagement and it also doesn’t require student engagement data to be collected. We believe the bill must include a definition, a call for a creation of a system of qualitative methods to be designed and implemented by the State Department of Education so that student engagement data can be collected and used to increase the safety and welfare of students, especially Black and Brown students in our schools and communities.”

**William Garcia, Yale Democrats:** William testified in support of this bill. In his testimony he highlights how the pandemic in a way exposed the inequity of the state as well as served to shine a light on the alarming rate of teen suicides and the lack of quality mental health services across the state. He supports this bill because it attempts to directly fix both issues.

**John M. Flanders, member of the Board of Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut:** John testified in favor of this bill but has some concerns about it. Some of his concerns are:

- “that families whose children require special education may be lured into less appropriate programs because the IFSP option seems more comfortable, and may even include more hours of services, rather than a program better designed to meet the need of the student to be ready to participate in education when they become old enough for kindergarten.”
- “Not enjoying the requirements of special education during the two years may tend to hamper the identification of a student when he or she is ready for kindergarten.”

He proposes that:

- “the section not be approved unless it is amended to include requirement for information exchange between the Birth to Five programs and the Local Educational Authority. A reasonable approach to achieving this would be to require the LEA to conduct a PPT Meeting once each year during the age three to five period to determine if the child is eligible for special education services.”

**Office of the Child Advocate (“OCA”):** The Office testified in support of this bill, but has some suggestions for this bill as well:

- Regarding suicide prevention programs: “It may be worth considering that similar work going on in the neighboring state of Massachusetts receives a 4 million dollar line item appropriation. Funding would go a long way to helping state and local leaders scale up suicide prevention programs and training.”
- Section 1:

- The State should provide a specific appropriation for this work to support critical community training efforts, with dollars available to the state agency co-chairs of the CTSAB to implement the goals of this legislation.
- 2) The OCA is not staffed or funded to facilitate the provision of the bill, but OCA does participate in the CTSAB and can consult with the CTSAB chairs on the work described herein. The CTSAB can report back to the Committee regarding progress with these important provisions.
- Section 23: “OCA suggests that the Committee conduct an annual informational hearing (or two) with DCF and outline a series of topics about which members will be briefed, including critical DCF functions.” (that are further mentioned in the document).
- Section 24: “It is important to underscore that a removal is only considered when a concern about the child’s safety in the home has been identified by DCF during its investigation, using both social work judgment and a research-based safety tool.”

The office extensively states many options for legislators to improve the bill.

**Department of Social Services (DSS):** The department testified in support of this bill. The department is in special support of sections 2-9, 20-21, and 25-43. It also stated that it agrees with the testimony of the Office of Early Childhood when it comes to further discussing possible changes to the Birth to Three program.

**Creative Interventions, LLC’s (CI):** Creative Interviews has testified in favor of this bill. It is stated that they work with the current Birth to Three program and support its development into birth to Five, they understand there will be fiscal implications and give an alternative stating that “To reduce the financial impact, the program can be systematically implemented beginning with those children whose birthdays are between the months of May and August.” CI supports the permanent removal of family fees stating that it creates inequalities across the state, currently the governor eliminated family fees through an executive order during the pandemic and it has significantly helped families that depend on the program. CI states that every dollar invested early in a child’s life is more money saved in the future, and in the fiscal year of 2019 the family fees accounted for only 2% of the program funds.

**Connecticut Association of Boards of Education:** The board testified in favor of this bill. However, it has one comment regarding Section 14. The board believes that “conducting a parent- teacher conference virtually make an effort to “assess the student safety in the student home” may be unduly intrusive and in fact discourage families from participating in remote parent- teacher conferences.” The board also commends the approach taken on section 12 of this bill.

**Esha Bhattacharya, Yale democrats:** Esha testified in support of this bill. Esha points out how easily the inequity of CT can be seen during the pandemic and how important mental health services are at this time and in the future to come. Esha is in support of this bill because it aims addressing CT’s mental Health challenges and flaws.

**Kennedy Bennet, student:** Kennedy testified in support of this bill. He points out how the pandemic has exacerbated the inequity of CT and how it disproportionately affects the BIPOC community. Kennedy supports this bill because it seeks to address access to equitable education by establishing an internet actress grant program.

**Leona Adamczyk, Parent and SICC- Vice Chair:** Leona testified in favor of this bill. She points out that she knows a family who had to choose to fix their car or provide education to their child through the Birth to Three program, and due to this fact, she believes that the B23 family fees should be removed because a child's education should not be put in jeopardy singularly due to money. Also children with birthdays in the summer have to wait until the fall to fully transition though this is not helpful, they should be able to transition whenever they are ready.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Olivia Tempesta, Connecticut public school teacher:** Olivia Tempesta testified in opposition of this bill. She states that from experience, she does not see the virtual model of learning/teaching as "practical nor sustainable for students or teachers in the long term." She points out issues such as student engagement in lessons, social engagement, etc. She also points out how this unsustainable model disproportionately impacts students of "working class families and students of color." Providing students with content as well as support due to the pandemic in person as well as online, has taken a "devastating toll on teachers this year."

**Angela Staron, Joel Barlow High School Educator:** Angela Staron testified in opposition to this bill. She stated that from her experience, having a dual classroom is an "absolute nightmare", she believes also that both students and teachers suffer, and once the vaccine is underway online dual classes should no longer exist. Some of her arguments are:

- Students should be facing computer screens all day long.
- Students are not able to fully engage with the classroom.
- It is burdensome to supply materials to students at home and in class.
- Students are depressed and some of them are turning to substance abuse.
- The bigger issue is "the disruption caused by changing a learning model for a few students every few days".
- Students are very likely to cheat if they are taking exams at home.

**Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK):** The organization testified in opposition to this bill. Their claims for doing such were:

- Sections 1-9: To the extent of having uniformed police officers in school, they would need the same training and the training needs to include "the fundamentals of social emotional learning and restorative justice."
- Section 10: Minors get certain rights of confidentiality, however, some schools who employ mental health professionals and the student's progress needs to be shared with the PPT, including parents.
- Section 13: The training and details specified are covered by HB 6557 and the organization is in support of that legislation.
- Section 14: Remote parent-teacher conferences should be permitted at any time. In addition, to send the police out to locate a student sends the wrong message. The organization believes the information should be removed.
- Section 15: The information is valuable.

- Section 16: Language is too broad. The organization asks this provision to be stricken from the bill.
- Section 17: While the provision is appropriate the standards for remote instruction should be stricter.
- Section 18: Acceptable to the extent that “days of remote instruction should not count as absences.” In addition, “[t]he references in the last line of section 18 should be to section 19, not section 21.”
- Section 19: “This provision will allow school officials to send home misbehaving students and not document it as a suspension.” This legislation will also encourage the skipping of test days and other days of stress. The organization asks this section to be removed.
- Sections 20-21: The definition of adverse childhood is incomplete, and the data serves no useful purpose. The organization asks these sections to be removed.
- Sections 22-24: “deal with DCF. SEEK will refrain from comment on these provisions.”
- Sections 25-43: Changing the age from three to five raises complications with relationship to special education services under the IDEA and substantially curtails the rights of parents. This legislation would only include children from four to five who “do not otherwise qualify for special education.” Further, “services that are free to families under the special education program could cost the family money under an expanded Birth to Five Program.”
- The organization recommends a “legislative change to ensure that Birth to Three providers have the same protection against retaliation as was provided to school staff in P.A. 19-184.”
- Section 44: The program should not be a matter of grants, it should be a fundamental right of every student. Further, the organization believes there is no reason to put the obligation of funding on local Boards of Education. It is also stated that the section as written should be removed.
- Section 45: Creates another unneeded task force. The organization recommends this section to be removed.

**Andrea Rowland, World Language Teacher at Joel Barlow High School:** Andrea Rowland testified in opposition to this bill. She states that it makes sense during the pandemic and potentially snow days but disagrees with the permanence of virtual learning/teaching in a regular setting. She believes students are less attentive and they cheat. She also adds that this format might work with higher education but not in high school settings.

Daniel Rivers, high school mathematics teacher in Region 9 Public Schools: He asks the committee to amend the current language to state that “virtual and hybrid learning models should be reserved *only* for emergency scenarios that necessitate a prolonged closure of school buildings.” He believes the model is not sustainable, not effective, does not establish a healthy community and social connections, is detrimental to the mental health of some students, affects social-emotional learning and is detrimental to the proper assessment of activities. He believes this bill is antithetical when it comes to the points that the public has requested schools to reopen during the pandemic and how section 18 sends a message that education is not important. He believes “it would be better to establish a commission to fully analyze such platforms and make scientifically based recommendations for their use going forward in non-emergency times.”

**Erin Pinsky, high school educator:** She testified in opposition of this bill. She urges the committee to amend the language of sections 16 to 18 to specify that “virtual learning is not to be an automatic mode

of instruction going forward.” She believes that virtual learning jeopardizes the quality of education a high school student gets, especially them because those are short four years before college seminars and more. One of her greatest concerns is social interaction that for once can be ignored virtually.

**Melissa Osborne, Training and Quality Improvement Manager Ambulance Service of Manchester:** Melissa testified in opposition to this bill. She stated that this bill is redundant in reference to SB 247, being that “EMS programs already were teaching the material that was mandated under the bill – making the required education redundant.” Currently, SB 116 is a proposed bill that if passed, it would remove “the requirement that a specific vendor be used to obtain the required “Mental Health First Aid Training” and it would set a precedent for not requiring a specific vendor for HB 4232.

**Meredith Nielson:** She testified in opposition to this bill. She believes that training of suicide prevention is not the answer for this problem and that minor in Connecticut should not be allowed to decide on their own accord if they will receive treatment without his/her parents knowing. She understands the concern on the part of the state with the welfare of children, but she believes the government is overreaching when it inserts itself between the parent-child relationship when mentioning “adverse experiences” something that according to her opinion, should be dealt between “children, their families, and their practitioners.”

**Kelly McConney Moore, interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT):** Kelly Moore testified in opposition to Section 20 of this bill. Even though she opposed section 20 she takes no position regarding the remainder of the bill. She states that Section 20 “contains alarming data tracking that infringes on the civil liberties of young people”. Some of the issues with this section are:

- “allows an enormous amount of data to be tracked and indexed to a child by name and other identifying information.” “This information, linked directly to a child, is too sensitive to be recorded and accessed by anyone who has access to the information system.”
- In Florida, the data about children were being used to pre-determine if children would become criminals, “In Connecticut, where about 70% of school districts have police on campus, making this data so widely available is incredibly risky to children.”
- In addition, “Student records were lost or breached over 8.5 million times in the 6-year period between 2005-2011.”

**Marilyn Mathes, Connecticut Education Association:** Marilyn has testified in opposition to this bill. She states that this proposal would cause harm and inequity across the state. She states many issues her own daughter faced when having to go fully remote this year due to covid. Some of the concerns she has/had heard about are:

- A teacher must divide their attention if they have a class online and a class in person, simultaneously.
- Remote learners show up late, often walk away, do not follow deadlines and submit assignments when in person students are expected to, require extra time to prepare for class.
- Results of tests are unfair from in person to online.
- Remote learners cannot see the white board and other visuals.
- Districts with a dual approach have affected students negatively due to lack of resources.
- Teachers notice a lower performance from online students.

- Remote instruction, especially unplanned, for Special Education, 504, and IEP presents difficulties and inequities.
- Students find it harder to keep up with class when they are online and have a harder time engaging.
- A teacher cannot see a remote student's work or their expressions.
- Music and art classes are very hard to be conducted in a dual style.
- Science labs cannot be done remotely.

**Amanda Lynch, kindergarten teacher for the Plainville Public school district:** She testified in opposition to this bill. She points out how teachers are feeling like failures for not being able to succeed in both the in person and hybrid models of teaching, in addition technology helps but it is not perfect and there are frequent technology issues popping up and compromising the quality of lessons. She states that students are falling behind because they are not able to apply their new skills, in addition she says that “[a] teacher's ability to make professional decisions have been taken from us.”

**Randall Light, Joel Barlow High School Educator:** Randall testified in opposition to this bill. He explains that he understands how convenient remote learning is, but the essence of teaching and learning is in person, the body language and communication. He encourages the committee “to reject normalizing online learning for the sake of students, teachers, and society.”

**Cathy Lee CREC Educator:** She testified in opposition of this bill. She believes the essence of teaching is related to creating bonds with students. She states that a “one size fits all” approach is not sustainable nor beneficial, further it does not help the educational equity in the state, she gives her student as an example, she did not fill a form and never got a Chromebook. She believes part of the education is the connection made with the student, and she has not been able to do such this past year.

**Marcella Kurowski:** Marcella testified in opposition to this bill. She stated that there are protocols in place for questionable behavior, that parents should be deadline with the rearing while school deals with the education of a child and that “The expansion of Birth to Three can be another bill.”

**Subira Gordon, Executive Director of ConnCAN:** Subira testified in opposition of this bill. He stated that “Connecticut suffers from one of the largest opportunity gaps in America” and that now is the time to fix these issues through significant investment. He proposes the definition of an engaged student to be:

- “a student in grade K to 12, inclusive, who participates in 75% or more of learning opportunities whether in-person, hybrid or remote by (A) signing into lessons, (B) completing assignments, and (C) participating in learning tasks.”

He also recommends that:

- “key long-term mitigation strategies for academic and social-emotional learning” be added to the bill. “Right now, this legislation creates many of the reporting and system inputs but does not directly address the policies and practices that will drive student outcomes.”

**Jacob Fricker, teacher at Regional School District #9:** Jacob testified in opposition to this bill. He stated that online teaching is ineffective, and it cannot replace in person instruction. He believes

decisions that affect their field of expertise should be made in conference with professionals of the area just as medical decisions are made.

**Andrew Cucinella, Newington Educator:** Andrew has testified in opposition of this bill. He stated that professors are mostly able to teach online and in person classes however, an asynchronous style “greatly decreases the teachers' ability to effectively manage student behavior and manage the academic structure and direction of the lesson.” Not allowing for a successful lesson.

**Jeff Leake, President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and Tom Nicholas, Vice President of CEA:** They testified in opposition to this bill. They believe that if there is not a public health emergency the dual system of learning should not take place. They suggest that:

- In times when virtual instruction is necessary, the state should provide adequate planning time and not hold dual lectures but either remote or in person.

The associations provide an extensive list of reasons for which remote/virtual learning is problematic for a few and why it broadens inequity within the state. They also provide a second extensive lists pointing out why remote and in class lectures that take place at the same time are problematic as well.

- When it comes to virtual parents' conferences, the association urges “committee members to remove this mandate and to defer to educators in the districts on how best to provide for a continual dialogue with parents.”
- Lastly, regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences: The association “believe[s] that the collection of ACES data at the state level in anything but aggregated forms is unwise and recommend[s] that more effective parameters be included. Moreover, with proposals to expand the sharing of state-collected student data to institutions of higher education and entities engaging in employment, the risk of misuse, abuse, or breach is too great.”

**Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM):** The conference testified in opposition of this bill. They stated that they understand the importance of the issues brought up in the bill but “new mandates on local and regional boards of education further minimize instruction time and may require additional resources that some municipalities may not have access to. “ They ask that:

- “the Committee provide a fiscal note on these additional requirements and flexibility for implementation at the local level if further action is taken on many of these provisions.”

**Mary E. Burnham, retired educator:** Mary has testified in opposition to this bill. Mary believes that there aren't enough guidelines for a student's mental health treatment without parental consent. She poses questions such as Who will determine if a child will receive the six sessions? What criteria will be used? She believes therapy should be dealt on an individual's basis instead of put in a bill and she believes that removing parents from these decisions will most likely be harmful for both children and parents. Her last concern is how teachers will determine if a child is living in a hardship situation and how they can determine this, what criteria can be used.

**John Bestor, Retired School Psychologist:** John has testified in opposition to this bill. He believes this bill sounds like an omnibus legislation that aims to solve many problems in the community but just furthers them. He believes that the ideas of the state neglecting to inform the parents who are the

student's primary caregiver of a child is outrageous. Also, it is redundant when teachers are described as mandated reporters because every teacher creates a bond with the child throughout the year. He believes parents should retain the rights of deciding what is best for their underage children.

**Elsa Batista, Newington Educator:** Elsa testified in opposition to this bill. She states the even though her district has been good with dual teaching (remote and in person) she notices people losing attention during lectures, many also do not feel comfortable with this style and do not engage as much. She teaches a world language where engagement and cameras on are fundamental, she states that she tried every day because she loves her students, but that each school should have one teacher for online and one teacher for in person.

**Gregory B. Allard, Chairman of CT EMS Advisory Board:** Gregory testified in opposition to this bill. He stated that:

- Sections 1 and 9: Language is duplicate because “through recent legislation, EMS is already required to receive Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training” in addition to the training received as part of the National curriculum standards for EMS.

**Reported by: Gabriela Dos Santos**

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