

Human Services Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, April 9, 2021

9:00 AM in Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by Chairman, Rep. Abercrombie C. 083.

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Berthel E. S32; Cabrera J. S17; Lesser M. S09; Moore M. S22

Representatives: Abercrombie C. 083; Arora H. 151; Buckbee B. 067; Butler L. 072; Case J. 063; Cook M. 065; Dathan L. 142; Garibay J. 060; Goupil C. 035; Hughes A. 135; Mastrofrancesco G. 080; Santiago H. 084; Simmons C. 144; Stallworth C. 126; Wood T. 141

Absent were:

Senators:

Representatives:

Rep. Abercrombie made opening remarks. She noted that once a bill gets referred to a committee, there is a seven-day timeline to vote on it. Otherwise, the bill dies within the committee.

Sen. Moore and Rep. Case gave opening remarks.

Rep. Abercrombie, on behalf of the Human Services Committee, expressed condolences for the loss of Rep. Arora's father.

1. [H.B. No. 6456](#) (RAISED) (File No. 74) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO PROTECT SENIOR CITIZENS FROM FRAUD. (AGE,HS)

Rep. Abercrombie asked for a motion to JF to the floor. The motion was made by Rep. Cook and seconded by Sen. Lesser.

Rep. Abercrombie explained that this bill puts together a task force to examine and find solutions to protect seniors from fraud. It seeks to address the fraud that elders experience through certain Medicaid-planning companies who do not have adequate expertise to help seniors with these decisions.

Rep. Abercrombie asked if there were any questions or comments.

Rep. Case noted that the Department of Social Services (DSS) is opposed to this bill because they believe they have adequate protocols in place to deal with fraud. He asked if DSS is still opposed to this bill.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that DSS has submitted substitute language to address their concerns. Rep. Abercrombie noted that the chairs of the Aging Committee will be notified of concerns related to the bill. At that point, the Aging Committee has the responsibility to address these concerns. She notes that the Human Services Committee does not amend other committee's bills. Rep. Abercrombie explains that she is uncomfortable amending a bill that she did not hear testimony on.

Rep. Case emphasized his concern that proper protocols are already in place to deal with fraud. Rep. Case believes the elder law attorneys should handle this, rather than an agency.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked about the power of the Human Services Committee to make amendments to a bill that was referred by another committee.

Rep. Abercrombie stated that bills are referred to committees that have cognizance over certain aspects of the bill. This bill was referred to the Human Services Committee because of its cognizance over DSS. Rep. Abercrombie explained that the Human Services Committee will not amend the bill because they have not heard the testimony. Rather, they will relay concerns to the chairs of the Aging Committee. It will be up to the Aging Committee to take action.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if the committee can amend sections of the bill that relate directly to the committee.

Rep. Abercrombie clarified that the committee could amend the bill, but it is not the normal protocol. She explains that the committee votes on the bill, and then relays concerns to the chairs of the original committee. Voting a bill of out committee does not suppose support for it on the floor of the house or senate.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco re-stated her confusion over why a bill would be referred to a committee if it's not common practice for it to be modified, if necessary, within that committee.

Rep. Abercrombie re-stated that it is simply the process to refer bills to committees that have cognizance over certain parts of the bill.

Rep. Arora said he is appreciative of the intent of the bill; seniors receive so many fraud attacks which must be addressed. He believes that DSS's concerns should be heavily considered, and he hopes they will be resolved through the process.

Rep. Abercrombie asked the Clerk to call the roll. The motion passed with 19 voting yea and 0 voting nay.

2. [Substitute for H.B. No. 6229](#) (COMM) (File No. 151) AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. (HED,HS)

Rep. Abercrombie asked for a motion to JF to the floor. The motion was made by Sen. Lesser and seconded by Rep. Santiago.

Rep. Abercrombie explained that this bill creates a system to connect higher education with DSS. This ensures that students who qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other benefits are able to receive those services. She noted that food insecurity is real, and not just experienced by younger students. Rep. Abercrombie said she believes this is an efficient method of helping to resolve food insecurity experienced by students of higher ed.

Rep. Abercrombie asked if there were any questions or comments.

Rep. Case emphasized his concern with legislating what higher education institutions do. Rep. Case said he believes that colleges and universities, at a local level, should be in charge of addressing food insecurity. He also mentioned his concern with out-of-state students, and where DSS would receive funding from.

Rep. Abercrombie noted that SNAP is a federal program that is universal, meaning the requirements are the same state to state.

Rep. Case stated that within his district, a community college has a food pantry for students that experience food insecurity. His concern is adding a layer of legislation mandating higher education to address this issue when they can and should do it on their own accord.

Rep. Abercrombie re-stated that food insecurity is a real issue, exposed more and more throughout the pandemic. This bill is critical in addressing this issue. Rep. Abercrombie noted the roadblocks currently in place which prohibit students from getting the support they need.

Rep. Case asked if this bill would go through the CT Board of Regents (BOR).

Rep. Abercrombie said it would be approved by the BOR and then implemented at the university level.

Rep. Case asked if this bill referenced the BOR.

Rep. Abercrombie said it is referenced in lines 51-55.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if a higher-ed student can be enrolled in SNAP through their family, or if they need to enroll as an individual.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that once individuals turn 18, they are no longer eligible under their parents. They have to apply individually.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if it's safe to assume that students who are eligible for SNAP benefits, receive grants and/or scholarships towards their tuition.

Rep. Abercrombie had no comment since that part of the bill does not concern human services.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if there was a work requirement in place to be eligible for SNAP benefits.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that there is currently a work program through the university system, and this bill connects directly to that program. This bill seeks to create a seamless process for students.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco said she believes this program was temporarily expanded due to COVID-19. Currently, students do not need to be enrolled in the work-study program to be eligible, they only need to be eligible for the program. She asked where the additional funding is coming from.

Rep. Abercrombie asked if Rep. Mastrofrancesco was referring to the enhancement for SNAP benefits.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if the eligibility for SNAP benefits has expanded, would the cost increase?

Rep. Abercrombie answered no because all of the university systems have work programs in place. This bill seeks to link employment with SNAP benefits.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco stated that pre-COVID-19, to receive SNAP benefits, students had to participate in the work program. Now, students can receive benefits if they are eligible for the work program. Rep. Mastrofrancesco asked if this makes more students eligible for benefits and if that increases the cost.

Rep. Abercrombie stated that SNAP is a federal program, paid for by the federal government. If someone is eligible for SNAP, because of food insecurity, there is no cost to the state.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco stated her concern that the SNAP funding will run out, due to expanded eligibility and enrollment, when the pandemic is over.

Rep. Abercrombie said that the enhanced match will end after the pandemic. But, an individual's benefits do not change. The bill helps to ensure that students who qualify for SNAP, know they are eligible through the university system. There is currently a barrier because not all SNAP students have parents who are on SNAP.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco is concerned about the viability of the SNAP program since the eligibility requirements have changed due to COVID-19. She asked if it was correct that colleges and universities have information on their website to encourage students to sign up for these benefits if they are eligible.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that she does not know.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco stated that if a bill is being referred to a committee, they should have the ability to have their questions answered.

Rep. Abercrombie responded that every committee member had the ability to reach out to DSS, or other stakeholders, before the committee meeting.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco agreed but also stated that since this is a public forum, the public has a right to witness these correspondences.

Rep. Abercrombie responded that if they have any constituents with questions regarding the bill, it is their responsibility to receive those answers.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco noted that she believes this bill is unnecessary because programs are already in place to deal with this issue. She said she believes colleges and universities are responsible for sharing information about these benefits. Rep. Mastrofrancesco commented that students need to be accountable for themselves and seek out these programs.

Rep. Arora noted that he appreciated Rep. Mastrofrancesco's questions. Rep. Arora said he believes this bill is far-reaching legislation, and thus requires more rigorous discussion. From his understanding, every student that makes less than \$1,064 a month and does not have assets, is eligible for SNAP benefits. Rep. Arora believes that this would make all students in the university system eligible. He believes that this bill will overwhelmingly expand eligibility for SNAP, without addressing the needs of students who experience food insecurity. Rep. Arora said he believes that a broad survey to identify students who are food-insecure is not effective, for many reasons. He asked Rep. Abercrombie if she had any insights into the unintended consequences of this expansion.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that it is not within the purview of the committee to give individual opinions about the bill. She stated she would answer questions related to the language of the bill.

Rep. Arora asked if Rep. Abercrombie believes all the elements in Section C are necessary to address food insecurity.

Rep. Abercrombie answered that that question is outside of the purview of the committee. She re-iterated that the committee is discussing students' access to SNAP benefits. She stated that 30% of college students do not have access to food due to their financial income.

Rep. Arora asked if the committee should remove numbers 2-6 of Section 1 C to focus on the substance on the bill, which is increasing access to SNAP.

Rep. Abercrombie answered no.

Rep. Arora asked why.

Rep. Abercrombie commented that Rep. Arora can vote no and suggested he could offer amendments on the floor.

Rep. Arora noted that he will be voting no because he believes this bill requires amendments to achieve its desired outcomes.

Rep. Buckbee stated he believes that not being able to amend the bill is challenging. He notes that lines 17-20 are open-ended, and not fiscally responsible. While Rep. Buckbee appreciates the intent of the bill, he believes its provisions are too vague to pass as law.

Rep. Case said he believes the programs should be offered by colleges/universities when students are going through the process of applying for FAFSA and financial aid. Rep. Case noted that he will be voting no because it is overreaching and unnecessary.

Rep. Abercrombie asked the Clerk to call the roll. The motion passed with 13 voting yea and 6 voting nay.

Rep. Abercrombie noted that the votes would remain open for two hours, until 11:45 AM. Rep. Abercrombie asked for a motion to recess the meeting. The motion was moved by Rep. Santiago and seconded by Rep. Cook.

The meeting was recessed at 9:48 AM.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 AM.

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Gianna Vollano  
Assistant Clerk

Heather Ferguson-Hull  
Committee Clerk