

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-854

AN ACT CONCERNING A LIST OF THE 100 MOST DELINQUENT CHILD

Title: SUPPORT OBLIGORS.

Vote Date: 2/23/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/16/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would remove the requirement for the Office of Child Support Services to publish an online list of the One Hundred most Delinquent Child Obligor. This bill is being introduced to reflect the modernization of Connecticut's approach towards low-income individuals who owe child support debts. It would encourage fathers to be engaged in their child's life in ways the child needs besides those solely of a financial nature. Ending the practice of publicly shaming fathers will create stronger families.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre Gifford, Commissioner, Department of Social Services

Susan Hamilton, Director of Delinquency Defense & Child Protection, and Ben Daigle, Deputy Assistant Public Defender, The Office of Chief Public Defender

They express support for this bill for reasons of a legal, financial, strategic, and practical nature. This requirement is antithetical to the Department's modern ideology of running the IV-D program, which aims to encourage parents to positively participate in their children's lives. Experience has demonstrated that shaming or threatening parents into a role of responsibility "often drives a wedge between families and can actually reduce child support collections." This bill reflects best practices in ensuring that children have the supports they need to flourish – while avoiding counterproductive shaming and stigmatization. This

outdated law does not accomplish its original intent to strengthen family connections and collect child support.

Commissioner Gifford adds that the department has never published a list of the one hundred most delinquent child support obligors, for several reasons. To publish this list, there would be large programmatic costs associated, for which there is no funding. Commissioner Gifford also notes that the Connecticut Legal Services raised concerns about the legality of publicly disclosing information from the state case registry. Lastly, few states and not one of Connecticut's neighbors in New England, including N.Y. and N.J., publish the names of delinquent child obligors. In the states that do publish this information, the criteria to determine publicity is more restrictive than under Connecticut's current law.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Lucy Potter, Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Kelly McConney Moore, Interim Senior Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT)

In their testimony, they both express support for this bill because a registry of this sort promotes shaming and ostracizing. Ms. Potter explains that this stigmatization is in opposition to the goals Connecticut has prioritized under the Fatherhood Initiative. She outlines how the statute conflicts with federal child support law since it is outside the authority of the IV-D administration to publicize information from non-IV-D cases. Ms. Potter mentions that in the few states that continue this practice, the cost of administering the program far outweigh the amount recovered. Ms. Moore discusses the negative consequences that could arise if this list is poorly maintained or inaccurate. She believes that Connecticut should focus on policies and programs that support and uplift young people.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There are no sources of opposition for this bill.

Reported by: Gianna Vollano

Date: March 8, 2021