

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6644

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION REGARDING

**Title:** SPECIAL EDUCATION TO FAMILIES AND STUDENTS.

**Vote Date:** 3/2/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/16/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children.

## **COSPONSORS OF BILL:**

Rep. Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th Dist., Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.,  
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.,

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would require Birth to Three service coordinators to provide information on special education to the parents and guardians of a child receiving services from a Birth to Three programs. It also requires the Department of Education to develop handouts for students with individualized education programs and 504 plans.

This bill seeks to codify many of the practices we see being currently provided. This bill ensures that these practices continue standardized across different Birth to Three companies. Parents and families often are unaware and left in the dark with their special needs child on the services they may have after the age of 3, this bill ensures they have the knowledge needed. This bill also seeks to provide informational pamphlets to children who may be unaware of the process occurring relating to their 504 plans.

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

State of Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Commissioner, Beth Bye, comments and appreciates the intent of the legislation. The current bill would codify practices of Birth to Three. They however add that they do not support the following language in the bill:

- "(2) review the individualized family service plan for such child with such person responsible for the administration and coordination of special education services to identify whether the school district has the resources necessary to adequately address the needs of such child through special education services for such child."

This wording suggests that the service coordinator would be the one to decide whether the school district has the resources needed for the child. The service coordinator should help with the transition not decide or determine whether a school district is eligible.

State of Connecticut State Department of Education, Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker, appreciates the bill but gives issue with some of the language in the bill. Such as the language referring to the service coordinator's role in supporting the family but not determining their eligibility or their potential supports for special education services. They suggest further exploration into suggested resource requests with more context of student participation and understanding of special education.

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

Reachout, Birth to Three, Executive Director, Elaine Balsley, supports this bill and believes that Birth to Three is a critical support to the children who need it the most. They are, however, are worried about the financial stability of Birth to Three companies and believe that adequate payment for the services they provide are critical.

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut, Legislative Chair of Special Education Equity, Andrew Feinstein, supports this bill and reminds far too many children who get services from Birth to Three do not receive special education services they need after turning three. This bill amends current law to ensure parents are informed about the services they have for special needs.

CREC Birth to Three, Director, Susan Flanagan, supports this bill and its admirable goal. They, however, want to ensure the proper funding is there to support these proposed programs. They ask for:

- Continue General Administrative Payment beyond 2024.
- Ensure legislation providing financial support.
- Fund reimbursement for language interpretation for all services.

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

SARAH Inc., Director of Children & Family Services, Julie Hall, opposes this bill and the overall purpose of requiring Birth to Three coordinators to take on responsibility for education families. This would put more stress on an already burdened system. They are also concerned with the failure to consider parents rights to refuse to share information about their child.

Interagency Coordinating Council, Chair, Cindy Jackson, opposes this bill and the purpose of this bill that assumes coordinating directors have the knowledge of Part B and the additional assumption that they have the capability of inheriting the responsibility of educating families.

The additional training and funding proposed is underfunded and adds additional burden to a workforce that is already facing recruitment and retention issues.

SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Director of Children & Family Services, Sophia Lampe, opposes this bill and the additional requirements it mandates on service coordinators in educating families. They add they already collaborate with Local School Agencies. This adds stress on a burdened system.

SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Regional Operations Manager, Jennifer Michael, opposes this bill and its intention to share information about a parent's child which goes against the parents' rights within the Birth to Three system. They add this adds stress on an already stressed system. They urge against the passage of this bill as it is currently written.

- SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Quality Support Manager, Jessamine Sargent,
- SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Service Coordinator, Brunella Trotta, LBA,
- SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Developmental Therapist, Jennifer Van Elswyk,
- SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, Occupational Therapist, Elizabeth Wilke,

opposes this bill and the proposed responsibility a service coordinator would be mandated to provide with regards to education families on the special education system (Part B services). Collaboration already occurs with Local School Agency as a part of transition planning. This increases burden on an already stressed system. They also voice concern that the language does not consider parents' right to refuse to share information about their child.

**Reported by: Christian Talarski**

**Date: 3/15/23**