

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5161

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL.

Vote Date: 2/29/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/22/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Committee on Children

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Travis Simms, 140th District.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would change the term "child pornography" to "child sexual abuse materials" in the general statutes.

The use of the term "pornography" dilutes the abuse and suffering that children experience and changing to the term "child sexual abuse materials" more accurately represents the circumstances. The change also helps to destigmatize child abuse and exploitation by getting rid of the implied consent that the term "pornography" carries.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[State of Connecticut, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of the States Attorney, State's Attorney, Sharmese L. Walcott](#): supports this bill and states that the change in language is long overdue. There are no similarities between adult pornography and the sexual abuse of children and it's good that the language will now reflect that. The use of the term "pornography" dilutes the abuse and suffering that children experience, and the liability of those who provide demand for it.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Dr. Linda Dalessio](#): supports this bill but does not believe the punishments are harsh enough. They suggest that there should be no threshold for a penalty and having one piece of child sexual abuse materials should carry a maximum sentence of more than 5 years in prison with substantial fines.

[Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Executive Director, Beth Hamilton](#): supports this bill because the term "child pornography" minimizes harm experienced by children and diminishes the seriousness of the crime by contributing to sentiments that there are no victims when child sexual abuse material is viewed. Viewing child sexual abuse material is in and of itself abusing children.

[Brien McMahon High School, Center for Youth Leadership, Member, Roshni Yousuf, also on behalf of the Stamford High School Youth Leadership Council](#): supports this bill because of the outreach done by them in their schools which was outlined in their oral testimony, and the research cited in their written testimony from the [U.S. Justice Department](#), [the Child Rescue Coalition](#), The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and [INHOPE](#) which is an organization funded by the European Union.

[Connecticut Children's Alliance, Executive Director, Krystal Rich](#): supports this bill because the term "child pornography" inadvertently implies a level of consent or voluntary participation that is not legally or ethically possible for children. The term "child sexual abuse materials" more accurately describes the content as documentation of abuse and exploitation. This change is part of an effort to address child exploitation and recognize the rights and needs of children as victims of abuse.

[Love146](#): supports this bill and states that this change in terminology has been adopted by almost all national entities addressing this form of victimization and helping to support those who experience it. Those national entities also formally recognize "child sexual abuse materials" as the preferred term for this form of victimization. They state that traffickers can use child sexual abuse materials to blackmail children into further exploitation because we continue to use terms such as "child pornography" and engage in victim blaming behaviors. This will help to destigmatize this form of victimization.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Stephen Mendelsohn](#) opposes this bill because they believe that the term "pornography" implies their disgust, and they believe changing it from "child pornography" to "child sexual abuse materials" diminishes their sense of outrage. They claim that the language change proposed by this bill only seeks to destigmatize the adult pornography industry, and that even legal pornography featuring two or more consenting adults is abusive and degrading. They then go on to list things they identify as issues in broader society, but do not necessarily pertain to children.

Reported by: Patrick Buckley

Date: 3/13/2024

