

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5213

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING DISCONNECTED YOUTH.

Vote Date: 3/6/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/28/2024

File No.: 81

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

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Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

Rep. Robin E. Comey, 102nd Dist.

Rep. Jason Rojas, 9th Dist.

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Rep. Juan R. Candelaria, 95th Dist.

Rep. Christine Palm, 36th Dist.

Rep. Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to improve school district data systems and practices to identify and support at-risk students and to establish coalitions and partnerships focused on supporting at-risk and disconnected youth. This bill was filed in response to the Dalio Education report on disconnected youth in Connecticut, which found that one in five Connecticut youth were at-risk or disconnected in 2022. According to Dalio, disconnection refers to youth aged fourteen to twenty-six who may have varying levels of secondary education but are not employed and not enrolled in postsecondary education. This bill attempts to alleviate this crisis through several programs, including a mapping study of Connecticut nonprofits, data sharing agreements between boards of education and youth services bureaus, free public bus transportation for students travelling to and from school, updating dual enrollment course rules and school graduation requirements, among others.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill corrects an internal reference (Line 163) and adds the bereavement task force (§ 15). The bereavement task force is established to create and administer a state-wide program for the delivery of bereavement and grief counseling services to children and families at no cost to participants. The administration of such program intends to alleviate the increasing number of students reporting feelings of depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, and general mental health concerns. It will serve as an additional mechanism for children and families to facilitate reconnecting young people to school or the workforce.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Labor (CTDOL), Commissioner, Danté Bartolomeo: supports this bill generally, however they express concern with Section 1(b)(4). Specifically, they state that the Two Generational Advisory Board is not the correct body to be statutorily required to provide recommendations to P20 WIN. They state that this Section may delay improvements that P20 WIN is in the process of making.

Office of the Child Advocate, Child Advocate, Sarah Healy Eagan: expresses support for this bill, highlighting particularly effective provisions, including those that would provide free bus rides on state owned buses for low-income students and that would devise a strategic plan for state and local agency coordination to collect and share data. Moreover, they provided several recommendations to the committee, including that the State should end suspensions of children from school, that the strategic plan for addressing the needs of at-risk youth include an accountability framework for education of children in "separate schools," and that any taskforces/working groups convened to look at needs and remedies for disconnected youth include advocates and providers of special education services.

Office of Policy and Management (OPM), Chief Data Officer, Scott Gaul: supports the goal of this bill, however they express concerns with several provisions. First, they state that the recommendations for improvement to the Connecticut Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (P20 WIN) may slow, rather than accelerate, OPM's current efforts to improve the data sharing process and their ability to retain and sustain data models for regular reporting. Additionally, they express concerns with Sections 3-6, stating they would not comply with federal education law.

State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene Russell-Tucker: supports the spirit of this bill, however they express concerns with several provisions which they state may impact the effectiveness of the initiatives in which the Department is already engaged. They state that the definition of "at-risk student" should be revised to not be limited to the three factors cited, and the definition of "disconnected youth" should be revised so that it does not include students who are currently in high school. Additionally, they state that sections 3-6 would require school districts and the Department to act in a manner that may not be compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). They also expressed concern that non-school staff will have access to student level data without parental consent. Moreover, they state the proposed change in Section 9 is not permitted in

federal law. Finally, they express support for the concept of free public transportation for students in priority school districts, however they recommend that students be allowed to show any documentation that demonstrates their school enrollment.

State Treasurer, Erick Russell: expresses support for this bill stating that it expands data sharing among state agencies, local schools, and nonprofits while mapping current services and identifying gaps in those services. They also note that this bill will serve as an invaluable tool to facilitate data-sharing of interconnected problems as it builds on the Connecticut Preschool through Twenty Workforce Information Network (P20 WIN).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

House Republican Office, House Minority Leader, Rep. Vincent Candelora: expresses support for this bill, however they ask the committee for it to be strengthened by including the approach of Domus Kids In Stamford. They report the successes of Domus, highlighting its comprehensive approach of considering trauma and mental health problems facing the youth while reconnecting them to education and employment opportunities.

House Democrat Office, House Majority Leader, Rep. Jason Rojas: expresses strong support for this bill, highlighting the particular importance of Section 3, which calls for data sharing agreements between Boards of Education and Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs). They state this will allow for better identifying, understanding the needs of, and working collaboratively to best serve youth in need of support while in school and out in their community.

Connecticut Business & Industry Association, Advocacy Outreach Manager, Paul Amarone: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the provisions that improve school data systems to identify and support at-risk students, review and update dual credit courses and dual enrollment courses, examine the accountability index, examine alternative educational opportunities, and develop a model student work release policy as particularly effective solutions to the youth crisis.

CT Cradle to Career Coalition, Policy and Civic Engagement Director, Kathleen Callahan: supports this bill stating that it captures and addresses the root causes of youth disconnection—societal and environmental factors.

Youth Services Director, City of Middletown, Justin Carbonella: supports this bill, in particular sections 3-6 that deal with data sharing. They share the success of a similar program in Middletown and call for its implementation statewide in order to provide adequate support to all youth.

United Way of Connecticut, Senior Vice President, Casavina Hall: expresses support for this bill, stating it will support essential actions by the State to build the infrastructure and knowledge needed to make a meaningful difference in the lives of youth across Connecticut. They highlight the development of a comprehensive plan that identifies disconnected youth and the leveraging of existing data platforms to share information as particularly helpful tools to achieve that end.

Stonington Teacher, Carrie Cassidy: states general support for what this bill intends to accomplish, however they also expressed concerns that students under the age of 14 are disconnected youth and that this is not only a high school student issue. They encourage the committee to explore new ways to engage students of all age groups.

CT Alliance of YMCAs, Vice President of Government Relations, John Cattelan: expresses full support for this bill and urges the Two-Generational Advisory Board to collaborate with their organization in devising strategies to assist at-risk students and reintegrate disconnected youth.

Connecticut Education Association: expresses support for this bill, however they ask the committee to consider funding a comprehensive community schools pilot designed to engage students, parents, educators, and nonprofit service providers in addressing barriers for disconnected youth, expand the scope of the bill to include students from pre-kindergarten through age 26, and create an ongoing role for parent and teacher engagement in the implementation of community schools.

Connecticut School Counselor Association, Executive Director, Michelle Catucci: supports this bill, thanking the committee for including CSCA in the working groups referenced in sections 13 and 14 of the bill. They suggest expanding the section dealing with Youth Service Bureaus to include other organizations, as not every district has an established Youth Service Bureau.

Connecticut Opportunity Project, Senior Portfolio Director, Adhlere Coffy & Amanda Olberg: supports this bill stating that the definition of disconnected youth included in the bill will allow for resources to be more effectively distributed to those who need them. They also express support for the nonprofit mapping provision, stating that when working alone, a nonprofit may not be able to produce its desired benefit. Finally, they suggest a modernization of the P20 WIN database, which would allow the state and nonprofits to monitor progress towards addressing the crisis over time.

Southern Connecticut State University, Student, Nick Crowley: supports this bill citing their own personal experience working with formerly incarcerated individuals. They express specific support for the establishment of a Two-Generational Advisory Board, stating that this board will transform the support system for disconnected youth, as it integrates family and community-based strategies.

Dalio Education, Founder and Co-CEO's, Barbara Dalio & Andrew Ferguson: expresses support for this bill and cites a report authored by the Boston Consulting Group entitled, "Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis" which finds there are approximately 119,000 young people ages 14-26 who are at-risk or disconnected in Connecticut. They state the importance of this bill in helping to alleviate this population.

Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias: supports this bill in its current form and thanks the committee for the work done on this issue. They also provide some suggestions, such as funding a comprehensive community schools pilot, expanding the minimum age of disconnected youth to pre-kindergarten from fourteen, and creating an ongoing role for parent and teacher engagement in the implementation of community schools.

Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership, CEO & President, Marc Donald;

supports this bill, particularly the sections dealing with data sharing efforts, the Two-Generational Advisory Board and nonprofit mapping study. They state that timeliness and coordination between agencies and nonprofits will lead to fewer youth being unaccounted for, and will help to ensure that all youth receive the services they need and are entitled to. They also encouraged the committee to include nonprofit service providers to share information with agencies, mandate the State's P20 WIN system to publish annual updates, require that school districts demonstrate that they know which students are off-track, require an interagency taskforce of state and municipal to support the disconnected youth, and to require a statewide plan for improving CT's alternative education system.

CT Youth Services Association, Executive Director, Kathryn Dube; expresses strong support for this bill, specifically sections three through six. They stress the importance of Youth Service Bureaus for disconnected youth and support the sections of this bill which will allow for YSBs to have access to a greater amount of data. They state that with this further data, YSBs will be better positioned to serve and support disconnected youth.

Forge City Works, Executive Director, Ben Dubow; supports this bill, specifically supporting the definition of disconnected youth presented in the language. They suggest an inclusion of additional funding for organizations, like Forge City Works, who provide support and services to disconnected youth across the state.

Domus Kids Inc., Executive Director, Michael Duggan; expresses strong support for this bill, stating that its provisions will lead to more success supporting disconnected youth. Additionally, they provide specific support for section seven dealing with bus passes, citing how providing passes to students facing transportation challenges will open up further opportunities for after school enrichment programs.

Sierra Club, State Director, Samantha Dynowski; expresses support for section seven of this bill, dealing with fare-free bus service for students in priority school districts. They support this measure as many students in these priority districts have limited transportation access and can use the money saved from transportation to pay for other necessities. They suggest expanding this provision to include all bus services in the state, as there are priority school districts located outside the service area of the CT Transit state run bus service.

Campaign for Working Connecticut, Member, Ebony Ellis; expresses support for this bill due to their own personal struggles with disconnection. Specifically, they hope for collaboration among nonprofits in this effort, such as Our Piece of the Pie, which helped them personally.

LEARN, Executive Director, Kate Ericson; provides specific support for section 12 of this bill. They state that training on trauma-informed practices is crucial in all school districts for both teachers and students.

SEEK, Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein; expresses general support for this bill, yet notes that it misses some important issues. They suggest taking further action such as banning suspension and expulsion and closing the school-prison pipeline as possible solutions to this crisis.

United Way of CT, Director of Advocacy, Daniel Fitzmaurice; expresses generalized support for this bill, stating that it is a significant step forward in the process to adequately support disconnected youth in the state.

SEEK, President, John Flanders; supports this bill, echoing the sentiments given in Mr. Feinstein's testimony. They stress the importance of ending exclusionary discipline within schools, presenting therapeutic support models as an alternative.

CREC and RESC Alliance, Executive Director, Greg Florio; expresses support for this bill stating that the program outlined in Section 12 will have an immediate impact on supporting the mental health needs of CT youth. They request \$1.2 million in funding to ensure equitable statewide access to trauma-informed care training.

CT Coalition to End Homelessness, CEO, Sarah Fox; supports this bill, specifically highlighting the merits of Section one, stating that its provisions will create a framework for effective intervention for disconnected youth. Finally, they express support for the data sharing agreements outlined in the bill, as they will foster collaboration between entities who all wish to support disconnected youth.

EASTCONN, Director of Adult and Community Programs, Kristin Hempel; expresses strong support for this bill, highlighting the eastern corner of CT being in particular need of programs targeting disconnected youth.

SCSU, Student, Samantha Henriquez; provides generalized support for this bill. They mention that while funding of the programs within will certainly be a question, the benefits they will provide will outweigh the potential costs.

Norwalk ACTS, Workforce Development Coordinator, Rhea Henry; expresses support for this bill, stating that its programs will positively impact the economy by providing employment opportunities for disconnected youth.

ConnCAN, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez; expresses general support for this bill, stating that increased coordination between stakeholders is imperative to provide adequate services and support to disconnected youth.

LEARN, Regional Trauma Coordinator, Tianna Hill; expresses strong support for Section 12 of this bill, stating a trauma-informed approach benefits all members of the school community. They report that since developing UPLIFT, 9 out of 10 participants who completed the training reported the information was useful and immediately applicable to their work. They also report that 95% of students who engaged with focus groups felt the information shared was relevant and useful to their lives, and they saw value in their school's becoming trauma informed.

New Haven Public Schools, Executive Director for Student Services, Typhanie Jackson; expresses support for Section 12 of this bill, stating that training regarding trauma based care is imperative in giving relevant stakeholders the proper tools to successfully support disconnected youth in the state.

Six to Six Interdistrict Magnet School, Assistant Principal, Sabine Januski; expresses support for Section 12 of this bill, stating that the UPLIFT program which the section would fund has provided their school district with critical training programs regarding trauma-informed care. They state how this program has positively affected students and staff in their school, and hopes that this program can be continued and expanded by this legislation.

Capital Workforce Partners, President & CEO, Alex Johnson; expresses support for this bill stating that the additional funding for initiatives that serve disconnected youth and the intent to support them through coalitions and partnerships would strengthen and update the current system to assure the services and supports are there to meet the needs of disconnected youth.

ACES, Pupil Services Director, Kevin Keating; provides support for Section 12 of this bill, citing the efficacy of the UPLIFT training programs on their staff. They urge the legislature to pass this bill in order to provide this training in all school districts in the state, so that all educators will be better positioned to support disconnected youth.

Montville YSB, Director of Youth Services, Barbara Lockhart; supports this bill, speaking on the data sharing provisions within it. They state that a data sharing scheme between YSBs and other nonprofit agencies will allow them to better serve their communities, as they will be able to use the shared data to drive informed and intentional decision making in supporting disconnected youth.

CT Youth Employment Program, Member, Daniel Lumpkins; expresses support for this bill stating that it includes essential steps in supporting the successes of disconnected youth, including developing a comprehensive, statewide plan and expanding a shared data system to improve coordination and outcomes.

CIAC, Executive Director, Glenn Lungarini; expresses support for this bill, stating that its provisions will open further opportunities for students to discover personal passions through extracurricular activities. They state that by doing this first, students will then become more engaged and committed within the classroom. Furthermore, they express support for the provision dealing with the review of high school graduation requirements and appreciate that CIAC is included in said working groups.

Dalio Education, Director of Partnerships, Christopher Lyddy; expresses support for this bill, however, provides several recommendations to the committee, including expanding the list of community stakeholders with whom school districts shall establish data sharing agreements to include other nonprofit organizations. They also recommend the committee to require the State to reproduce and expand upon the data included in "CT's Unspoken Crisis" report on an annual basis.

CREC Polaris Center, Principal, Kelly Maio; expresses strong support for Section 12 of this bill, citing their own personal experience with the program in their school. They express the benefits that UPLIFT trainings have provided their staff and hopes for that same benefit to be available to all schools and districts within the state.

CABE, Executive Director, Patrice McCarthy; provides generalized support for this bill, yet does provide some suggestions. Regarding Section one, they suggest including CABE,

CAPSS, CCM and CCST in the groups collaborating with the Two-Generational Advisory Board. They also suggest updating Section five, as they contend it may be logistically challenging to schedule support meetings with the different individuals designated in the legislation.

CT School Counselor Association, Government Relations and Advocacy Committee Member, Virginia Messina: expresses support for the spirit of this bill, however, they note concerns that not all towns are connected to or have available to them a YSB or JRB. They also note that there are often fewer resources made available to rural districts in CT, which exacerbates the disconnected youth problems in those areas. They encourage the committee to provide the necessary funding to those areas, removing the barriers many rural families face.

United Services Inc., Prevention Services Director, Emily Morrison: supports this bill, however, they express concerns with the amount of funding made to their organization. They state that USI receives \$46,121 per year in state funding to serve 6 towns; however, in practice, they serve 9 towns, making the state funding inadequate in supporting their additional duties. They ask the committee to provide additional funding to YSB's and JRB's.

CSCU, Director of Government Relations, Chelsea Neelon: expresses support for this bill stating that dual enrollment opportunities maximize the affordability of higher education for CT students and prepares them for success in college or careers. They do, however, provide some suggestions to alleviate any potential accreditation issues in the future. They urge the committee ensure the language has the Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) certify and approve the instructor credentials for concurrent and dual enrollment courses. To maintain clarity, they also provide suggested definitions for terms, including "Dual Enrollment, Concurrent Enrollment, Dual Credit, and Early College."

CT Data Collaborative, Executive Director, Michelle Nold: expresses strong support for this bill's identification that CT's nonprofits need significant assistance managing their existing data, avoiding duplication of services, understanding their impact, and developing data management systems. They state that CTData is an ideal partner for the creation of the state-wide shared data platform and request that CTData be the lead agency in providing data capacity technical assistance.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Director of Public Policy, Brian O'Connor: expresses support for this bill, recommending the committee to build off the model used to produce the "CT's Unspoken Crisis" report and continue its operation and integrate it into P20 WIN annually. They also express support for the provisions that that establish data sharing agreements between state agencies, local and regional boards of education, and nonprofit service providers.

Fairfield County's Community Foundation, President & CEO, Mendi Paca: expresses support for this bill in its current form, noting that its provisions align with their focus area of youth educational opportunities. They state that if conditions are made which allow disconnected youth to gain the training and experience needed to take on entry-level jobs, the state and region will benefit economically. They state that this bill will take many important steps to make those conditions a reality within Connecticut.

The following representatives from CREC submitted testimony in support of this bill.

expresses support for Section 12 of this bill and request the committee to create a \$1.2 million dollar line item in the State Department of Education's budget to permanently fund Trauma Coordinator positions and ensure statewide access to trauma-informed care (TIC) training and consultation for all CT schools and districts.

CREC, Regional Trauma Coordinator, Diana Perry
CREC, Chief Program Officer, Heather Tartaglia

EASTCONN, Executive Director, Eric Protulis; expresses support for the bill in its current form and comments on the importance of the UPLIFT training program for educators. They state that over 2500 school staff were able to be trained through UPLIFT with only a single year of funding, and that this could be expanded to many more educators were this program funded in the coming years.

CAPSS, Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz; expresses strong support for this bill in its current form. They note that a variety of the provisions within the legislation align with recommendations made in CAPSS's 2024 Public Policy Agenda & Blueprint Update.

The following representatives from ACES submitted testimony in support of this bill.

They express support for Section 12 of this bill, emphasizing the need for continued funding for the Regional Trauma Coordinators positions.

ACES, Director of Trauma Support Services, Cynthia Ratchelous;
ACES, Assistant Executive Director, William Rice;

Our Piece of the Pie, CEO, Hector Rivera; supports this bill in its current form and stresses the importance of updating graduation and promotion requirements for disconnected youth, as they face a much different set of academic challenges than traditional students.

Hartford Public Schools, Superintendent, Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez; expresses strong support for Section seven of this bill. They state that this provision would alleviate transportation challenges faced by many HPS students, giving them added flexibility in both getting to school and opening up opportunities for enrichment after the school day and after the school bus leaves.

Effective School Solutions, Sr. VP for District Partnerships, Mike Roseman; expresses support for this bill in its current form, mentioning specifically the data-sharing provisions. They state that a strong data-sharing network among agencies who work with disconnected youth will better allow providers such as Effective School Solutions to get the right resources to the right students quickly and efficiently. Additionally, they suggest the legislature to investigate recent legislation from California which will make all school-linked mental health services reimbursable through both Medicaid and commercial insurance. They state that a program like this in Connecticut would be incredibly beneficial.

Compass Youth Collaborative, CEO, Jacquelyn Nazario; expresses support for this bill in its current form. They specifically highlight the importance of the data-sharing provisions included, stating that this will help community-based organizations better serve the youth in their programs. Finally, they mention that they have seen the efficacy of data-sharing

programs among agencies in Hartford and hope to see this model expanded across Connecticut.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal:

expresses support for this bill, highlighting several provisions of particular importance, including the provision that calls for Technical Education and Career System and for the labor commissioner to develop a model student work release program; the provision that provides students with free bus passes to make transportation to and from school and work easier; and the provision that establishes a statewide data-sharing network, which fosters collaboration among organizations.

GNHCC-QCC, President, Garrett Sheehan: supports this bill, stating that this issue is an economic one and highlighting the data-sharing provisions as one way to get disconnected youth into the workforce. Additionally, they share some concerns regarding Section seven dealing with free bus passes. They mention that a completely open bus system may have unintended consequences and encourage the legislature to amend the language to clarify that the free bus transportation should be allowed only in safe spaces, such as school buildings.

City of Stamford, Mayor, Caroline Simmons: expresses support for the data-sharing provisions within this bill. They state that with a comprehensive data-sharing program as outlined in this legislation, key stakeholders and partners will be better prepared and better equipped to provide their services to youth that need them the most.

Center for Latino Progress, Transport Hartford Coordinator, Jay Stange: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the provisions that improve school district data systems and practices to identify and support at-risk students and that establish coalitions and partnerships focused on supporting disconnected youth. They suggest the bill could be strengthened by extending fare free bus service to all students across the state and to all bus services.

Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center, Program Director, Sara Steinberg: expresses strong support for Section 12 of this bill, citing their program's success using the UPLIFT training module. They wish to see this program receive continued funding, so that it will be available to providers across Connecticut.

Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), Executive Director, Martha Stone: expresses support for the majority of this bill, however, they express concerns about Section 1(b). They state that this section should include interface with state agencies such as the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch, Department of Children and Families (DCF), State Department of Education (SDE) or any existing state legislative bodies already entrusted with the responsibilities outlined in the bill, including the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Council (JJPOC).

CCIC, President, Jennifer Widness: expresses support for the concept of expanding dual credit programming statewide but is concerned about potential unintended consequences of Section 8 of this bill. They state more time is needed for institutions to prepare to meet NACEP standards. They also state that this bill puts the burden on districts to ensure faculty are qualified to teach dual credit courses and provide professional development.

Tobin Center for Economic Policy, Executive Director, Dave Wilkinson: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the importance of systems such as P20 WIN, which enables 14 participating state agencies, higher education institutions, and nonprofits to securely share data and inform policy and program administration.

LOVE146, Chief Programs and Strategy Officer, Erin Williamson: supports this bill in its current form and thanks the committee for their commitment to supporting disconnected youth in the state. They give a summary of LOVE146's work in this sphere and state that this legislation will only increase the amount and quality of service they will be able to provide.

Anonymous: supports this bill stating that they personally know many disconnected youth and want to see them supported. Furthermore, they state that this bill will support transgender youth, who experience a high rate of suicide.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:

Teacher, Terri Franzi: expresses concern with their students' mental health, noting they are reporting feelings of depression, anxiety, and lack of motivation. They state that this is significantly affecting their performance in school as nearly half of their freshman students are reading below grade level.

Reported by: James Magson & Benjamin Lee

Date: 3/21/24