

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5437

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATE RELIEF.

Vote Date: 3/20/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/13/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

There are multiple pieces to this bill regarding educator professional development requirements, FAFSA and graduation requirements, financial allowances for school districts to carry over 2% of unexpended funds into the following year, and compost mandates.

Current educator requirements in the state require teacher in-service/professional development trainings. Changes include the installation of the Educator Professional Development Mandate Advisory Council which will be required to submit annual reports. This bill would also include the development of a statewide database between the Department of Education and a third party to track completed trainings to create efficiency and retention of high-quality educators. This bill will also allow each local and regional Boards of Education to be the provider of such trainings.

The bill also allows for school districts to deposit up to 2% of unexpended funds into a reserve, therefore granting regional boards of education the flexibility to create reserve funds without additional hoops to jump through.

It will also mandate that the FAFSA be completed by all students to graduate from a high school in Connecticut, as well as require all schools within a 20-mile radius and a 26-tonnage in food waste to compost at one of the three facilities located in the state to combat waste problems.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Commissioner, Katie S.

Dykes: expresses concerns with Section 8. They state opposition to the new 20-mile radius and the 26-tonnage requirement, citing that this will disqualify most educational institutions in the state and is not what the legislative intent was of P.A. 23-170.

State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene M. Russell-Tucker:

supports Section 1 regarding the formation of an Advisory Council, and strongly recommends that the work be aligned to an existing council to review the current mandates. The Department does not support Section 2 and 3 due to the significant costs associated with implementing. The Department supports Sections 4 and 5 empowering local and regional boards to ensure trainings are as expected every five years as well as the timeframe. The Department does not support Section 12, citing the provisions unnecessary because legislation already allows for a family to waive the requirement.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Education Association (CEA), President, Kate Field: supports the creation of the advisory council to review professional development for educators, provided a CEA representative is included in collaboration efforts. CEA is also in support of the state-wide database, citing that centrally located information would save time and resources for teachers and administrators during educator shifts. She also supports the bill as it will avoid duplicative mandates and streamline professional development.

Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Vice President, Joslyn DeLancey: supports this bill, citing the need for targeted, effective professional development, and encourages this as an optional substitute for the Foundations of Reading Survey.

Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CSBO), Director of Government Affairs, Sherri Dinello: supports the 20-mile radius language, indicating that it is expensive for schools to implement outside of this radius. They suggest delaying implementation to allow time for education of students, budgeting purposes, and piloting the program. They also cited that delaying implementation may allow for cost reduction due to technological changes at the compost plants.

Derby Board of Education, Chairman, Jim Gildea: is in support of Section 9 in particular, citing the importance of autonomy for Boards to have flexibility with the 2% unexpended funds to quickly and efficiently cover emergencies, unanticipated funding, or necessary repairs if needed.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), Executive Director, Patrice McCarthy: supports this bill with stipulations. Section 1 is supported citing the importance of efficiency of professional development, but suggests amending the bill to include Connecticut Education Association (CEA), American Federation of Teachers in Connecticut (AFT CT), and Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK). Section 2 and 3 are supported, preventing duplicate trainings and improving effectiveness. Section 4, 8, and 9 are all supported.

The Woodstock Academy, Head of School, Christopher Sanford: supports this bill, citing that it has many positive attributes and would provide flexibility and relief for schools across

the state, but suggests an adjustment to Section 12 to reflect the difficulties for international students to complete the FAFSA, and that the law would have unintended consequences for students on a visa that would therefore be unable to obtain a diploma in Connecticut.

Regional School District 16, Superintendent of Schools, Michael Yamin: supports the bill for local financial control to encourage more responsible financial management, which will allow schools flexibility to carry over unspent funds and establish reserves.

Regional School District 15, Superintendent of Schools, Joshua Smith: supports this bill, citing that the additional flexibility would grant boards of education to manage unforeseen challenges.

Derby Public Schools, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Matthew Conway: supports the bill. Section 9 allows for schools to responsibly manage their finances, protecting municipalities against unforeseen costs from unforeseen expenses, and allows for transparency and accountability. He is in support of Section 10, citing that it allows local and regional boards to effectively plan for initiatives and contingencies.

Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut (SEEK), Attorney, Andrew Feinstein: supports the bill, but is surprised to have not been included in the Educator Professional Development Mandate Review Advisory Council and recommends adding SEEK to the Council.

Redding Board of Education, Chairman, Laura Worosz: supports this bill as it grants greater flexibility and efficiency for the capital needs of schools, and allows them to act prudently and swiftly. This is opposed to the current procedures resulting in many months of meetings and a town vote for the unexpected financial burdens that are bound to happen, and allows for strategic financial planning.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Sierra Club, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Ann Gadwah: opposes this bill, citing the many problems with Connecticut's waste stream. Reinstating the 20-mile radius would be a step backward from the progress made towards improving the food waste programs across the state, as well as education and development of programs to divert food to those dealing with food insecurity.

Sustainable Fairfield Task Force, Equity Chair, Emma Kaye: is a concerned parent from Fairfield that has helped implement a pilot composting program at Riverfield Elementary. She cites that reinstating the 20-mile radius will discourage the progress being made across the state and that all schools in Connecticut should be encouraged to compost regardless of distance.

Connecticut League of Conservation Voters (CTLCV), Executive Director, Lori Brown: opposes this bill citing that the reinstating the 20-mile radius and 26-tonnage requirement would hinder progress and exclude many institutions, and encouraged food waste to be donated to those battling food insecurity.

Fairfield School, PTA President, Lisa Alberts: expressed concern that the bill will not have the desired effectiveness with the high tonnage limit, as well as concern with the 20-mile radius with their only being three compost facilities in the state.

Stratfield Elementary, Green Team Co-Chair, Laura Comerford: opposes this bill, citing the 20-mile radius would restrict Stratfield Elementary School who does not fall within this radius but has been implementing its own compost program.

CT Zero Waste Coalition, Member, Susan Eastwood: opposes Sec. 8, citing that the high tonnage requirement is very high and a step backward, as it's been demonstrated that smaller compost collections have been effective at schools across the state and should not be discouraged.

Dwight Elementary School, PTA Co-President, Alexandra Sise: opposes the 20-mile radius, feeling it does not make sense and would be a step backward.

Conservation Law Foundation, Program Assistant, Marc Gonzalez: does not support this bill for the reinstatement of the 20-mile radius and the 26-ton tonnage requirement.

Burr Elementary School, Green Team Committee Chair, Aimee Grayson: opposes the bill, citing that there is an increased need for all students to be required to compost, as they typically leave 50% or more of their lunch on their plate, and this bill would be a step backwards.

Regional School District #18, Superintendent of Schools, Ian Neviaser: opposes this bill due to Section 10, citing that limiting the use of funds has helped protect reserve funds and due to lack of clarity with the term "educational expenditure" in the bill.

Fairfield Public Schools Green Team, Allison Vanderpool: expresses opposition to reinstating the 20-mile radius and the 26-ton requirement for composting, citing that most schools do not fit into this radius and unless the tonnage limit comes down, most schools will not be able to reach it. She recommends all schools be required to compost regardless of distance and tonnage amount.

The following residents and public school representatives submitted testimony in opposition to this bill.

They particularly oppose the provision of the bill regarding schools within a 20-mile radius producing 26 or more tons of compostable waste being required to compost. They state that their schools, which are outside of the 20-mile limit, already have reportedly successful programs, and express their belief that this bill would be a step backward, as few schools are within the proposed radius.

Elly Fatehi

Sarah Hart

Joyelle Hood

Amanda Ingrassia

Anne Lowinger

Allyson McGrath

Amanda Romaniello

Pippa Bell Alder

Sarah Evans

Mary Hogue

Parent, Marilina Imperati: opposes this bill due to the lack of training in the bill for Special Education teachers.

Town of Fairfield, Resident, Jennifer Jacobsen: opposes this bill for the lack of clarification on how STEM courses will be evaluated for the graduation requirements.

Connecticut Coalition of Environmental and Economic Justice, Member, Rebecca Kessler: opposes this bill citing its lack of vision and ineffectiveness as a sustainable solution to the food waste crisis.

Town of Killingly, Resident, Ian McDonald: opposes Section 8 of this bill due to the 20-mile radius and the 26-tonnage requirement, and suggests instead a food-diversion program.

North Stratfield Elementary School, PTA President, Courtney Radosavljevic: does not support this bill for the reinstatement of the 20-mile radius and the 26-ton tonnage requirement and feels it would be a step backwards.

Hebron Public Schools, Superintendent of Schools, Thomas J. Baird: expresses both support and opposition. He is in support of multiple pieces, including simplifying the professional development requirements, leaving implementation up to local boards of education, the changes to prevent duplicative training requirements, and allowing local boards to deposit unexpended funds at the end of the school year. His opposition is in regard to the state-wide record keeping of professional development, citing concerns with the implementation of such a database. He suggests collaboration with local school districts should be required when implementing.

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz: provided public comment regarding the bill. The bill would help with high-quality educator retention but cites that CAPSS had understood there would be a reduction in the frequency of in-service and professional development trainings, not that the bill would allow local committees to determine. CAPSS stated that the concept of working with a third party vendor to develop a database has merit, but the short turnaround time could create significant financial burdens.

Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), Executive Director, Betsy Gara: both supports sections of this bill and opposes others. Supported provisions includes the creation of the advisory council, the repeal of the duplicative training mandates, and the 20-mile radius (though recommends promoting the collection of organic material instead). COST opposes Section 9 and 10, citing that it undermines the roles of the board of finance and selectmen when determining plans for unexpended funds. They suggest reevaluating the "Right to Read" mandate.

Regional School District 5, Director of Finance and Administration, Theresa Lumas: recommends pushing out implementation date to January 1, 2025 to allow time for estimation of costs, pilot the program, and educate students. She also recommends allowing for

exemptions if a vendor cannot be found to haul organic material, as well as provide a formula to allow schools to judge if they have 26-tons per year.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Advocacy Manager, Lindsey Seti: supports Section 1 of the bill and opposes Section 8, citing that they rather would support voluntary programs towards food scrap programs. CCM opposes Section 9 and 10, citing that they believe this financial responsibility remain with boards of finance or boards of selectmen to retain transparency.

Southern Connecticut State University, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Christopher Trombly: thanks the Education Committee for beginning to address the issues presented in *Task Force to Study the Comprehensive Needs of Children in the State* report, which held recommendations suggesting removal of mandates for schools.

Reported by: Carla Galaise

Date: 4/15/24