

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-327

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE EFFECTS OF HATE

**Title:** SPEECH ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND ACHIEVEMENT.

**Vote Date:** 3/12/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/5/2024

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children

## **CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3<sup>rd</sup> District.

Rep. Kadeem Roberts, 137<sup>th</sup> District.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would establish a task force to study the effects of hate speech on children. =.

This task force would allow for the study and future implementation of more effective programs to combat hate speech in schools to foster a more tolerant and accepting learning environment that would help to ensure the long-term success of students.

S language would amend the charge of the task force to study the effects of bullying in addition to hate speech ("bullying" definition is identical to that which appears in 10-222aa) adds additional data points for task force to study in (a)(2) to (a)(5), lines 5 to 22 amends definition of "hate speech" to include expression concerning sex and body weight or type of an individual, clarifies who should be appointed to the task force.

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

**NOTE: TESTIMONY MAY NOT REFLECT CURRENT LANGUAGE OF THE BILL**

[Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, Chairman, Nicholas Kapoor](#): supports this bill because exposure to hate speech at a young age can have severe long-term consequences. They cite a survey from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's "Making Caring Common Project" which stated that about 15% of students did not feel safe in bathrooms, and the same percentage also felt excluded or were called mean names frequently or most of the time. A third of students stated that staff do not respond effectively at all or respond only slightly effectively to bullying. According to Gallup's February 2023 findings, 19.7% of Generation Z identify as part of the LGBTQ+ population and, according to The Trevor Project's 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ people, LGBTQ+ people are at an even greater risk of bullying and harassment. They recommend adding the Executive Director of the CHRO or their designee as a task force member, appointing a teacher to the task force, and adding two high school student members to the task force. This proposed legislation is pivotal to understanding the impacts of hate speech on our children's well-being and academic success.

[Department of Children and Families, Commissioner-Designate, Jodi Hill-Lilly](#): supports this bill because it aligns with the responsibility of the Department of Children and Families, which is to ensure and promote the safety and well-being of all children. They state that there is no benefit to hate speech, but the task force's findings will help the Department to more effectively support children subjected to it.

[The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity, Legislative Policy Analyst, Rosemary Lopez, and Children's Policy Analyst, Thomas Nuccio](#): support this bill because of the amount of hate crimes in the state of Connecticut since the beginning of 2018, which reflects the necessity to study hate speech and its harmful effects on children. Research indicates that young people who were exposed to online hate speech commonly experience negative feelings such as, anger, sadness, or shame, as well as diminished levels of trust. Exposure to hate speech can also result in political radicalization and a lack of coping and social-emotional skills.

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

[Anonymous, Genevieve Cabrera, Jamie Krzmarzick, Lauren Tagliatela, Scott Friedman, Timothy Gabriele, Yale Pediatric Gender Program, Associate Professor, Christy Oleszki](#): supports this bill and state that 25% of students nationwide experience some form of discriminatory harassment. Students experiencing this develop depression and anxiety; participate less in school and extracurricular activities; perform poorly academically; and are at higher risk of self-harm and suicide. They state that students who use hate speech are more likely to become victims of substance abuse, get into physical altercations, drop out of school, and be an abusive partner. This task force will identify what is happening on school grounds and reinforce to schools that it is more cost effective to appropriately deal with hate speech on school grounds and online between students.

[Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers, Executive Director, Melanie Wilde-Lane](#): supports this bill because it would allow them to continue to offer support for young

people who can then continue to thrive and remain in school which is critical to their future. They also cite the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, specifically pertaining to hate crime incidents in the state of Connecticut from the year 2020 through the year 2023.

[Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias](#): supports this bill because of the hate speech CEA members have witnessed at local Board of Education meetings, on playgrounds and little league fields, and in school communities. The impact of this manifests in students as stress, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, self-harm, and un-realized potential. They cite a CEA resolution from its own 2020 Representative Assembly stating the danger of White supremacist groups and all media sources that promote hateful speech and actions, and the continuation of institutional racism. They also recognize the danger posed by any group that marginalizes anyone based on race, color, national origin, political beliefs, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, size, marital status, or economic condition. They request a role on the task force to ensure that educators are a part of the discussion.

[Dr. Carol Felder Anderson](#): supports this bill because their children have been victims of targeted racial discrimination, harassment, and hate speech in Westport Public Schools. The investigations and repercussions for perpetrators do not work. They state that in-school suspensions and expulsions but returning in two weeks are not proportional to acts of hate, such as the types experienced by their children. This leaves victims feeling isolated, anxious, depressed, stressed, scared, confused, abused, and more.

[Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut, Executive Director, Michael Bloom](#): supports this bill because, due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, antisemitic acts have risen in the United States by 300%. They state that there has also been a subsequent rise in hate speech in schools over the past several months as well. They suggest briefing schools on what hate speech is, surveying what schools are doing to combat hate speech, and surveying students on whether they have experienced hate speech.

[Julian James](#): supports this bill because of the racism experienced from administration and children in the Westport school district. Their children have experience name calling such as monkey, slave, or ape, from students and then getting pulled from class by administrators and put into a different room for special needs so often that they're now struggling academically relative to their peers. They call this a micro-aggression. They state they have wanted to pull them out of the school for a long time, but are unsure of the best course of action.

[Laura Orban](#): supports this bill and requests that this task force include the study of numerous, targeted book challenges and the effects on children of these challenges in its work.

[Parent, Albertha Brown](#): support this bill because the experiences their child is going through in their transition from Kings Highway School to Coleytown Middle School. They state a few examples, from their child's time in Coleytown Middle School, such as one student placing a post-it note on their child's back that had the writing "I am a slave" on it and another where a student called them over just to show them the N-word written on a piece of paper. They were assured multiple times that disciplinary action would be taken, but either very little or no

actions were taken. This results in an environment where students, especially students of color, feel completely silenced.

[Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut \(SEEK\), Legislative Chair, Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council, Member, Andrew Feinstein](#): supports this bill and states that there is no better predictor of hate crimes than hate speech. Schools can and do prohibit hate speech, although that is reactive and doesn't stop it from happening, only punishes students once it happened. They state that an educational program, specifically a skill-based civics program, that teaches tolerance, acceptance, respect, and treating others as individuals would be best. Hate speech not only has a serious negative impact on children, but it also undermines the basic support for civil society. They suggest two additions to the task force: the chair or designee of the Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Council and a representative of SEEK should both be a member of the task force.

[Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut \(SEEK\), President, John Flanders](#): supports this bill and states that hate speech generally targets or is expressed toward weaker or different individuals and children with disabilities are often the most different and therefore get targeted. Also, children who experience anxiety, language issues, and other disabilities may feel the pain of being subject to hate speech more than their peers and then may avoid seeking support if it would call attention to their disability. Children with disabilities may respond to this type of abuse in unexpected ways like pushing back aggressively, breaking down, or internalizing the pain only to have it break out in unrelated ways later on. They may also express themselves in ways that others might consider hate speech when there is no intent to harm or a lack of understanding that they are doing so. They state that punitive programs will not help these problems and we must teach them how to understand the pain their expressions cause and address the conditions that prompt their aggression. They request that the task force makes three additions; a representative from SEEK, the Chair or Designee of the Connecticut Hate Crimes Advisory Commission, and a representative from the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers.

[Sunila Fadl](#): supports this bill because of the hate speech that their children have experienced. Hate speech has limited their ability to reach their full potential and has made them feel like they do not fit in. They state that their nine-year-old twins have been called the N-word multiple times and their seven-year-old had to hear derogatory remarks about the color of her skin. By establishing a task force to study this issue, Connecticut could better understand the causes of these mental health challenges and develop effective strategies to address them.

[TEAM Westport, Chair, Harold Bailey Jr](#): supports this bill because of their experience going to an integrated school in the time of segregation in Tennessee and their experience raising their children in Westport, CT. They state that with the growth of social media and the recent political climate, the "N-word" pass and students making monkey sounds in the hallways have become significantly more normalized. They submitted a [second piece of testimony](#) as well that states that they have amassed a lot of testimonials on the impact of hate speech and ongoing bias in children. They cite [this paper on white privilege and ongoing bias in school culture](#), [this paper on the racial and ethnic bias problems in school culture](#), and [provide 8 more sets of prize winning essays](#).

[Westport Educator, Faith Sweeney](#): supports this bill because they have witnessed children in all grades hearing and using hate speech over their 28 years of teaching. Students subjected to hate speech become anxious, withdrawn, and have lower self-esteem. Because of the lower self-esteem, students lose the confidence to participate, don't build trusting friendships, and don't develop a sense of belonging. They encourage the task force to study the research of Bettina Love, Claude Steele, Zaretta Hammond, Geoffrey Cohen, and other social justice leaders. They also encourage the task force to include school psychologists from urban, suburban, and rural communities.

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

[Dr. Linda Dalessio](#): opposes this bill because there are no taxpayers, parents, grandparents, medical professionals, or mental health professionals on this committee. They suggest asking some of these experts in their community to serve and then appointing them completely at random. They state the primary cause of poor mental health in children is Ideology and gender confusion.

[Evangelicals United, Dereck Clark, Retired, Merna Gagne, Americans for Trump, Alexander Karlson, Michelle Munson](#): opposes this bill.

**Reported by: Patrick Buckley**

**Date: 3/20/2024**