

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6535

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING ISSUES RELATING TO SCHOOL SECURITY.

**Vote Date:** 3/15/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 3/3/2021

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Education Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill establishes a 19-member legislative task force to examine the role of SROs (School Resource Officers) in public schools and recommend whether they should continue to be utilized. It requires study of inside-and-outside-locked classroom doors and a statewide plan for responding to large-scale school crisis events; It requires DESPP to audit school's security and safety plans through random unannounced visits beginning in 2021-22 school year.

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

### **Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education:**

While SDE supports the content of this proposal, they do not have the resources to adequately meet the responsibilities and deadlines that would be placed on them. (These concerns seem to have been addressed by the substitute language)

### **Sarah Healy Eagan, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:**

The presence of SROs has been proven to dramatically increase arrests of students of color. Under resourced school administrators often resort to relying on police to deal with issues that should not require a police response, sometimes as a strategy to access hospitalization. If resources continue to be invested in law enforcement rather than the needs of students, the consequences will be dire. The proposed task force lacks adequate representation for parents, youth and disability and civil rights advocates.

**James Rovella, Commissioner, Department of Emergency Services and Public**

**Protection**: DESPP, Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security should be added to the task force. DEMHS's working group has provided a template school security plan which can be expanded with the concepts in this bill. In regards to school audits, they would request an additional 2-3 positions to perform that work.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Brian Anderson, Legislative Coordinator, Council 4 AFSCME**: There is great value in SROs, they not only protect the students, they provide a counseling function and help young people deal with difficult and dangerous situations. They suggest including a seat on the task force for a Council 4 AFSCME police officer, as they are the state's largest police union.

**Sabira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN**

**Kelley McConney Moore, Interim Senior Policy Council, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut**

**Agata Raszczyk, Managing Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Connecticut Legal Services and New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.**

This bill is an important step in addressing the criminalization of students of color, however it is concerning that the task force does not include student voice, community advocates or civil rights organizations.

**Representative Carol Hall, 59<sup>th</sup> Dist., Assistant House Republican Leader:**

Classroom doors should absolutely lock from the inside, studies have shown that it protects kids and teachers. SROs do as well, and so it's unclear why they would need to be studied. Developing a state-wide crisis plan and conducting audits of school security are also important measures in keeping kids safe.

**Gale Heath, Administrative Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.:**

CABE supports this bill, and supports local decision making on this issue. The input of students and staff is critical.

**David Lenihan, Director of Government Affairs, Connecticut Association of School**

**Business Officials**: Supports the bill and requests that a member of CASBO be included in the task force. Their members are responsible for aspects of school business and operations including security, facilities and safety, and they can offer a unique perspective on the issue.

**Gabriel Lomas, Clinical Program Coordinator, Western Connecticut State University:**

Supports the bill and requests that he be included in the task force. Hopes this will lead to the development of a School Safety Center, which would develop and run crisis teams. This would provide equitable crisis support to high-poverty schools.

**Glenn Lungarini, Executive Director, CT Association of Schools/CT Interscholastic**

**Athletic Conference**: Supports the bill, with the provision that 2 representatives of CAS are included in the task force. Their organization contains both principals and students with unique and valuable perspectives.

**Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities**: CCM appreciates the intent of the bill to assist towns and cities to consider issues of school security, and they request that municipal government representation be included in the process.

**Orlando Rodriguez, Research and Policy Development Specialist, Connecticut Education Association**: Thanks, the committee for their desire to make education even better, and the many hours they dedicate to that task.

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

**Robert Bibbiani**

**Andrew Feinstein, Attorney, Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut**

**Robert Goodrich, Executive Director, Radical Advocates for Cross-Cultural Education**

**Marissa Halm, Director, TeamChild Youth Justice Project, Center for Children's Advocacy**

**Christina Quaranta, Executive Director, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance**

**Sana Shah, Chief of Staff, Connecticut Voices for Children**

This task force includes too many police representatives and too few students and advocates for children of color and children with disabilities. We do not need a task force to study SROs, we already know that their presence results in higher rates of arrest, especially of students of color. Police in schools need to be replaced with counselors.

**Isabelle Hargrove**

**Anne Manusky, President, Connecticut Republican Assembly**

**Lorrie Rodrigue et al., Superintendent, Newtown Public Schools**

**Bryan Verillo, President, Glastonbury Police Officers Association**

Both SSOs (retired police officers) and SROs are vital to protecting children and helping at-risk youth. The decision to keep SROs should be made at the local level.

**Reported by: Dallas Emerle**

**Date: 3/16/2021**