

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5242

AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND

Title: EXPLOITATION TASK FORCE.

Vote Date: 3/10/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/1/2022

File No.:

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SPONSOR OF BILL:

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

COSPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Mary Welander

Rep. Jaime S. Foster

Rep. Robin E. Comey

Sen. Saud Anwar

Rep. Eleni Kavros DeGraw

Rep. Christine Palm

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill assembles a task force to study and learn how to better prevent online sexual abuse and exploitation of children. This task force is necessary because of the increased use of social media by children, which has led to the significant growth of sexual exploitation by sexual predators. This issue will continue to grow as more children have unsupervised, unrestricted access to the internet. Current statutes do not reflect the realities of and possibilities for grooming children through online platforms and updating them to truly encapsulate the breadth of grooming predatory practices in a way which provides for prosecution is immensely complex and this group will be tasked with formulating recommendations with current technology usage reflected.

The substitute language for this bill will appoint 5 members appointed by the chairpersons of the joint standing committee to employ a wider array of individuals who can best protect the children from online sexual predators.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Sarah Healy Eagan, Acting Child Advocate of the Office of the Child Advocate, supports the establishment of the task force to study online sexual abuse and exploitation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Roo Powell, Founder of Safe From Online Sex Abuse, supports this bill, speaking from her experiences using child decoys on the internet to attract and expose adult sexual perpetrators, leading to their arrest. SOSA provides online safety education for children and parents and hopes that H.B. 5242 will implement laws and establish a task force that can respond accordingly to online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Bethany Hamilton, Executive Director of the CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, supports the bill and speaks to the importance of the task force due to the unprecedented and unsupervised access to online spaces. CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence asks to be included as a member of the task force to bring the victim's point of view into the conversation. They also reference the Kid's Online Safety Act, to create safer spaces for children online.

Sarah Holmes, Community Educator of Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, supports the bill and speaks to the importance of online sexual violence prevention, and how further research is needed to prosecute the perpetrators of online sexual crimes.

Krystal Rich, Executive Director of Connecticut Children's Alliance, supports this bill because of how many children fall victim to child sexual abuse and exploitation each year. They are thankful proposed federal legislation and the Kid's Online Safety Act and are hopeful this task force will work to better protect children.

Mark Suda, Police Officer of Norwalk Police Department, supports this bill, speaking of his time spent with Roo Powell during the production of "Undercover Underage," and the importance of establishing a task force to reduce sexual exploitation of children. In police departments, there aren't enough resources to mitigate online sexual abuse, which the task force could also work to help.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Molly Lukiwsky

Date: 3/17/2022