

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6845

AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Title:** TO ESTABLISH A BOOK GIFTING PROGRAM.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2023

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

**PH Date:** 3/8/2023

**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

Rep. Dominique Johnson, 143rd Dist.

Rep. Robert Sanchez, 25th Dist.

Rep. Frank Smith, 118th Dist.

Rep. Mary Welander, 114th Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill sends provides additional funding for various reading programs in CT. Currently, around 65% of Connecticut's students are considered below proficient in reading. Various reading problems have been established across the state, and they have been effective in combatting this problem. Allotting more funding to these programs would allow them to expand their reach.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language eliminates the original bill text and instead appropriates \$500,000 from the general fund to the State Department of Education (SDE) for FY 2024 to establish a book gifting program.

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

**State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene M. Russell-Tucker:** recognizes the importance of families taking an active role in teaching their children literacy and expresses support for the expansion of book gifting programs.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Laura Dancho:** cites their experience with their town's book gifting program, which has helped their children and grandchildren to see reading as a fun activity as opposed to a chore.

**Reach Out and Read Northeast, Executive Director, Alex Chu:** *discusses* their own program's effectiveness in getting kids interested in reading. They state that participants in this program see a marked improvement in their children's literacy

**Windsor Board of Education, David Furie:** states that family involvement is needed to teach kids to be good readers and that a book gifting program is a perfect way to promote reading at home.

**United Way of Central & NE CT, Board of Directors Member, Michael Goldbas:** states that reading to kids is the best way to get them interested in books. They state that a book gifting program is the best way to get families to read to their kids more often.

**United Way of Central & Northeastern CT, CEO, Eric Harrison:** states that disadvantaged families typically do not have extra money for books, so their children read less as they grow up. They state that a book gifting program can go a long way towards helping to close the education gap in Connecticut.

**Read to Grow Inc., Executive Director, Suzannah Holsenbeck:** cites the effect their organization has had on young readers, having distributed over 2 million books since its founding in 2000. They state that their organization's work was most profound during the pandemic, when the 70,000+ books they distributed helped families get through tough times.

**Kids Read Now, CEO, Leib Lurie:** notes the effectiveness of book gifting programs established in other states, citing evidence that book gifting programs can lead to higher levels of reading proficiency and help fight learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**School and State Finance Project, Community Engagement Associate, Jen Nakos:** states that this bill is an opportunity to advance equity in Connecticut, as disadvantaged families often have trouble acquiring high quality kids' books. They also state that book gifting programs are effective in getting more kids to enjoy reading.

**Connecticut Children's Medical Center, President, Jim Schmerling:** emphasizes the importance of the first five years of a child's life for literacy education. They state that book gifting programs get families reading to their kids as soon as they are born.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

**Ready to Grow Inc., Books for Babies Coordinator, Laura Noe:** opposes this bill, stating that the legislature should appropriate funds to a Connecticut-based book gifting program as opposed to a national program\*.

*\*The substitute language for this bill addresses these concerns.*

**Paula Grim:** expresses opposition to the use of a national book gifting program in place of a Connecticut-based book gifting program\*.

*\*The substitute language for this bill addresses these concerns.*

**Connecticut Republican Assembly, President, Anne Manusky:** expresses opposition to the use of public funds towards buying books for families. They state that families should utilize the public library system if they want books to read for their kids.

**Education Reform Now CT, Executive Director, Anne Dowell:** expresses opposition to the data collection required by the bill. They state that the efficacy of book gifting programs is already established, and further data collection needlessly puts a burden on administrators\*.

*\*The substitute language for this bill addresses these concerns.*

**Reported by: Sam Gilberti**

**Date: 3/28/2023**