

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6883

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/15/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Education Committee

Representative Mitch Bolinsky, 106<sup>th</sup> Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill looks to improve transition services for students with disabilities moving out of K-12 special education. Additionally, the bill seeks to improve transparency and accountability within special education and disability services to ensure practices are carried out in compliance with current regulations. Finally, the bill includes provisions to improve equity for all students seeking special education services and disability transition services. This is in response to concerns and existing issues with inconsistent oversight and implementation with transition services and with inequities and lack of transparency that some students and their parents experience when attempting to get needed services and assistance.

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

**State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene Russell-Tucker:** provides comments on each section, stating support for the concept of improving and providing more adequate transition services. However, they share several concerns, including whether it is appropriate for SDE to oversee the coordination of transition services and other requirements in this bill that they state would overstep the authority of other agencies, the availability of funds and resources to SDE to carry out its charges outlined in the bill, and certain conflicts between this bill and existing processes.

**Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Commissioner, Jordan Scheff:** acknowledges the importance of transition services for student success as they move from secondary education to adulthood. They raise concerns that Sections 15 and 16 would

require DDS to assist a significantly larger population of students, which they state would be unrealistic without major funding and staff increases.

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

**[Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, & Opportunity \(CWCSEO\), Policy Analysts, Megan Baker and Thomas Nuccio:](#)** support this bill stating that it will ensure special education students receive a full year of transition services.

**[Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut \(SEEK\), Vice President, John Flanders:](#)** states that transitioning out of K-12 is currently the worst enforced and least effective element of special education. They add that often students with disabilities are not given individual attention and that faculty fail to properly assess students' needs and potential. They explain that this bill is vital for improving the state's ability to adequately provide students and their parents the services they need.

**[Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut \(SEEK\), Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein:](#)** writes in strong support of the bill explaining how each section of the bill will help to solve persistent problems with the current implementation of special education and transition services. They note that many of the provisions in this bill are critical for better-serving our special education students and their parents.

**[School and State Finance Project, Executive Director, Lisa Hammersley:](#)** supports this bill's provisions to create a smoother transition process and more transparent and accountable special education system overall. Additionally, they express strong support for Section 13 of the bill stating that it creates a more equitable educational experience.

**[Literacy Learning & Assessment Center of CT, Director, Sheryl Knapp:](#)** supports this bill, specifically the expansion of eligibility for special education services. They write that the 18 to 22-year-old period for people with disabilities has a drastic impact on the trajectory of their lives and the ability for them to seek employment and grow their independence. Additionally, they note that often students whose birthdays occur during the school year reach an abrupt stop to their services, which they state can be a traumatic experience.

**[The Arc of Connecticut, Inc, Director of Advocacy, Carol Scully:](#)** supports this bill, stating that it will help improve access to special education and better-prepare students with disabilities for a successful future. They specifically commend the bill's provisions for establishing an office of transition and mediation services, the expansion of the age of eligibility for services, providing translators for parents that are Limited English Proficient, providing resources explaining the complaint hearing process, and educator training.

**[Center for Children's Advocacy - Youth Justice Project, Director, Marisa Halm:](#)** supports this bill stating that it will make drastic improvements for special education students, particularly those most vulnerable and underserved. They specifically highlight the bill's provisions that they state would support students preparing for life beyond school and expanding the age range for transition services, create the Office of Mediation Services for greater accessibility for parents, protect English Language learner students and families, and ensure greater transparency and accountability with respect to complaints and oversight.

**Parent, Laura Fiorenza:** supports the expansion of special education eligibility. She states that the additional time that students would receive with this age expansion would be critical in helping students better-develop their skills and abilities before moving on to life beyond school.

**Town of Brookfield, Resident, Andrew Corea:** supports the bill, specifically the requirement of random audits of local special education programs. They state that, as a parent of a student with special education requirements, they have witnessed firsthand the disarray of special education in their town, and they add that audits from SDE would bring poor-functioning programs to light.

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

**Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) & East Hartford Board of Education, Area Director & Chair, Tyron Harris:** expresses concern that the expansion of special education services would put additional strain on SDE, which is already experiencing staffing issues.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:**

**Cheshire Board of Education, Chair, Anthony Perugini:** does not express support nor opposition to the bill but raises some general concerns. They write that the bill would add additional staffing and financial stress to already understaffed and underfunded programs. They ask that the Special Education Cost Share Reimbursement be fully funded.

**ConnCASE, Executive Director, David Scata:** states their support for providing transition resources online as well as the development of a training program for transition coordinators. They state their opposition to the expansion of eligibility for disabled students due to increased costs without increased funding. They add that this expansion of eligibility would allow DDS to provide minimal support while students remain the responsibility of their respective schools for an additional year.

**Disability Rights Connecticut, Executive Director, Deborah Dorfman:** states her support for the provision that updates the eligibility age in compliance with federal law and the requirement of interpreters for English Learner students and families. They do raise concern for section 13(F)(ii), stating that it is not inclusive to guardianship and conservatorship alternatives which can result in a loss of rights, improper support, perpetuate antiquated stereotypes about people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

**Reported by: James Carroll**

**Date: 3/27/2023**