

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5426 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT REQUIRING THE AVAILABILITY OF AN ADVISOR DURING

Title: DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/10/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Eilish Collins Main, 146th Dist.

Rep. Tracy Marra, 141st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for HB-5426 is to provide advisors and/or support persons for students facing disciplinary hearings in institutions of higher education in Connecticut. Students faced with such stressful hearings alone have been seen to be more unstable mentally and emotionally, causing, according to the proponents of this bill, increased rates of suicide in young people. This bill would allow support individuals to be present at all hearings of this sort and be informed of the process therein to keep the accused student stable and, it is theorized, reduce the suicide rate of college students.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language for HB-5426 clarifies that the requirement for advisors applies to hearings in which a student is faced with a five day or more suspension, expulsion, or barring from participating in intercollegiate athletic programs. Also, it indicates that there are no requirements in this bill to force universities and colleges in Connecticut to provide an advisor for students under this bill. Finally, it conforms all hearings pursuant to Section 10a-55m of the General Statutes which differ with this legislation specifically regarding sexual assault, stalking, and/or intimate partner violence shall dictate how advisors or support persons are provided to students.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, Interim Chancellor, O. John Maduko: Interim Chancellor Maduko provides general commends on this bill, claims that CSCUs already have

such a policy in place, excepting when under Title IX proceedings pursuant to rules and regulations put forth by law.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Wave Strong, Chandler Aitken: Aitken supports this legislation as they have personally experienced the harm of losing a family member to suicide and believes this bill could help parents be with their children in times of great stress during disciplinary hearings at institutions of higher education, helping to reduce the rising suicide rates.

Sasco River Center, Head of Learning Services, Anonymous Anonymous: Supports this legislation believing it will benefit mental health in institutions of higher education.

Wave Strong, Anonymous Anonymous: Supports this legislation given personal experience with suicide and the effects of college stress on students in institutions of higher education.

Sasco River Center, Executive Director, Christopher Bogart: Supports this legislation commenting that as a Clinical Psychologist they see this bill as being an important protective measure for youth in this state.

Jonathan Bradley: Supports given the increased levels of suicide seen in the state.

Wave Strong Foundation, Co-Founder, Laura Bremer: Bremer voices support for this legislation claiming that young people, who according to science, have not developed mentally to a degree where rational thinking is at par with adults. This legislation would allow an adult to be with the student at disciplinary hearings and, according to Bremer, prevent suicides that occur when a student is faced with stress and given the research, are more likely to commit suicide than an adult in these situations.

Norwalk Resident, Eric Byrne: Byrne supports this legislation commenting that a national study from 2007 – 2022 has seen a steady increase in suicidal ideation in U.S. college students, which this bill could reduce as having an advisor present would help said students navigate these stressful experiences and improve their well-being on campus.

Andrea Callagy: Callagy supports this legislation commenting that, as a mother, she sees the stresses that her children face in college which, for some, prove overwhelming. By having the ability for advisors to be present at disciplinary hearings, those students who would consider suicide can be guided down a more rational path and prevented from taking their life.

University of Connecticut, Director of Community Standards, Kimberly Carr: Provides general comments on the bill but reiterates that UConn already practices a policy wherein advisors are allowed into disciplinary hearings at all levels of contact and the institution informs students before beginning any proceeding that they are privy to such advisory support if they wish to utilize it at any time.

Carr also questions the scope of the bill, claiming that it may mean institutions would have to train more staff to act as advisors in these hearings, which would put undue strain, according

to Carr, on them. Thus, she proposes substitute language that would clarify intent and align with these recommendations without jeopardizing the language in and of itself.

Beatrice Clements: Supports this legislation commenting that this bill would not alter the authority institutions have to pursue and address disciplinary responses to misconduct while protecting students by allowing guidance and emotional support thorough the process.

Wave Strong Club, Lindsey Dauk: Supports this legislation as a club board of aspiring college students who see the protection of mental health to be a positive step towards reducing the stress students must face when attending institutions of higher education in this state.

Wave Strong Foundation Inc., Board of Directors, Evan Dunne: Dunne expresses support for this legislation claiming that disciplinary hearings may cause acute stress to students involved in them and by providing the availability of advisors to support them through said case, in a fair manner without jeopardizing an institution's ability to adjudicate internal disciplinary matters.

Brian Keating: Supports this bill as they have experienced stressful situations negatively affecting mental health as a student athlete at UConn and wishes for other students to not have to navigate them alone, especially in matters of disciplinary hearings.

Darien Public Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, Shirley Klein: Klein expresses support for this legislation claiming that it is an important step forward in supporting mental health on college campuses. They claim that it works to prove that "Connecticut affirms its commitment to student rights, due process, and compassionate campus governance."

Karl Kolderup: Supports this legislation claiming that especially as a parent of an NCAA athlete this bill serves to support student stability by reducing stress so they can focus on school, private life, and socio-relational relationships that build character in the formative years of their lives and identity in college.

Wave Strong Foundation, President, Tracy McEvory: Provides strong support for this legislation as they have personally lost their son, Matthew to suicide as he was just about to begin his college career. Bringing awareness to and reducing the increasing stigma around suicide and mental health. They also ask for a few additions to the bill to increase its effectiveness including a stipulation that advisors be notified before the beginning of a proceeding, if an advisor cannot be found for a student, the institution must provide one, and that the advisor be provided with updates about the case at all points in its progression.

Youth and Childrens Ministry Noroton Presbyterian Church, Associate Pastor, The Reverend Gary M. Morello: Reverend Morello expresses his support for this legislation claiming that in 2022 their community experienced the effects of losing several young people to suicide. If young people are allowed to have an advisor present at hearings at institutions of higher education, it is theorized by the Reverend that that would improve mental and spiritual health of those involved, reducing personal and family stress while not jeopardizing their educational pursuits.

Yvonne Nicholls: Expresses support for this legislation claiming that by having required reporting and competency requirements for advisors can assist in reducing harm and stress resulting in the increasing rates of on-campus suicide.

Sacred Heart University, President, John Petillo: President Petillo expresses general comments on this legislation claiming that, while he appreciates the Committee's attention to this issue, Sacred Heart University already possesses and practices a policy wherein students are encouraged to bring an advisor into disciplinary hearings per their code of conduct. They are also, "[C]oncerned that a statutory requirement permitting unrestricted participation by parents or legal counsel could fundamentally alter the nature of campus conduct proceedings. The involvement of legal counsel may transform educational proceedings into quasi-litigation, emphasizing legal strategy over learning and accountability."

Sasco River Center, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Carrie Potorff: support for this legislation claiming that through her experience as a Clinical Social Worker she has seen the effects of isolation that occur to young people when they navigate such stressful situations as they do in college. With the presence of an advisor in a disciplinary hearing, Potorff theorizes, students will feel less isolated and reach out for the help they need to keep on track as they navigate complex legal concerns related to these hearings.

Town of Darien, Director of Human Services, Ali Ramsteck: Director Ramsteck expresses support for this legislation claiming that it is an important first step to preserving student well-being and fairness on college campuses amid an increasing statistical rate of students who have reported suicidal ideation on college campuses in the U.S.

Wave Strong, Alexandra Swift: Supports this bill claiming that it can help in reducing the suicide rate and aid institutions of higher education by lowering the risk for incurring wrongful death suits brought by the family of students who take their own lives given the stresses of disciplinary hearings without an advisor present.

Kathrine Swift: Supports this legislation because she claims that, as a mother of a young person, she believes that this bill would allow her and other parents to be there for their children if they were involved in a disciplinary hearing, hopefully saving lives in the process.

Mackenzie Swift: Supports this legislation claiming people like herself have felt alienated by the administration of institutions of higher education, especially during such hearings, and by allowing advisors stress levels could be reduced as well as suicide rates.

Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, President, Jennifer Widness: President Widness expresses general comments on this bill claiming that they suggest caution as many of their member institutions already have such policies regarding allowing advisors during disciplinary hearings.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Tom Atwood

Date: 3/25/2026