

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-311 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING DISCONNECTED YOUTH.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for this bill is to address and help give resources to disconnected youth in the state of Connecticut. Through requiring P20 WIN to share data, lowering the maximum days for an in-school suspension, allowing out-of-school suspensions for violent behavior, acts of sexual misconduct, or possession of a weapon, and requiring the Department of Education to create a Disconnected Youth Investment Grant program, this committee believes that this bill will benefit and help support students in need. These disconnected youths need help staying in school and preventing other harmful outcomes.

The Education Committee states that the P20 WIN data is important to share because this gathered information can help make educated and responsible decisions for our disconnected youth. Lowering in-school suspension days per year and removing out-of-school suspension discipline for nonviolent behavior will benefit students by keeping them in school when they need it most. Out-of-school suspensions lead to lost learning time, damaged student-teacher relationships, and disproportionate impacts on Black, Brown, and neurodivergent students. Through this legislation, the Committee hopes to provide recourses, support, and a sense of belonging to the disconnected youth of Connecticut.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute (1) adds new sections 1-5 changing P20 WIN to DataLink CT; (2) eliminates the requirement that the executive board of P20WIN annually report on data related to youth outcomes in Hartford (§ 1) and replaces it with a similar provision regarding Hartford (see lines 145 to 151); (3) makes changes to the student suspension provisions, now section 6, and clarifies that a preschool student cannot receive an out of school suspension (was § 2);

and (4) expands eligibility for the Disconnected Youth Investment Grant program the bill creates to include workforce development organization and multi-organization collaboratives (now § 7).

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education

The Department of Education submitted testimony on S.B. 311 expressing partial support while raising significant implementation concerns. It opposed Section 1's data-sharing requirement, explaining that the existing DataLinkCT system already provides a secure, legally approved framework for sharing data with researchers and nonprofits. Tucker warns that federal privacy laws such as FERPA prohibit sharing identifiable student data for individual case management. While the Department supported the intent of Section 2 to reduce out-of-school suspensions, it cautioned that limiting them only to the most severe offenses could hinder schools' ability to respond to rising issues like threats, harassment, and confrontational behavior, emphasizing the need for flexibility to protect school safety and allow time for restorative interventions. The Department also noted that expanding in-school supports would require substantial new funding and staffing. Regarding Section 3, it raised concerns that the proposed Disconnected Youth Investment Grant program lacks funding in the Governor's budget and would require significant resources and a coordinated, system-wide strategy to effectively reengage youth.

Dante Bartolomeo, Commissioner, CT Department of Labor

This testimony expresses support for responsible data sharing through DataLinkCT but opposes Section 1 of SB 311. The testimony argues that the provision is unnecessary, as DataLinkCT already facilitates secure, legal, and ethical data sharing, and warns it could risk violating state and federal privacy laws. Additionally, the author notes that the bill's requirement for annual data sharing is unsustainable due to the lack of dedicated state funding and the impending expiration of federal grants.

TJ Nuccio, Children's Policy Analyst, CWCSEO

The CWCSEO supports SB 311, particularly Section 2, emphasizing that it would help address significant racial disparities in school discipline, where Black and Latino students are disproportionately suspended and expelled. The testimony states that limiting out-of-school suspensions and expanding trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate supports across all grade levels would improve student outcomes and reduce negative consequences like absenteeism and justice system involvement. The organization also supports funding for disconnected youth programs, while recommending stronger data privacy protections to ensure compliance with federal law.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Iyanna Bellamy, Student

This testimony shares an individual's experience entering foster care at age 15 and the emotional and academic struggles that followed. The author explains how the Domus School Engagement Program provided critical support, helped manage emotions, rebuild confidence, and succeed in school. Now accepted into multiple colleges, this author credits the program for her progress and urges the committee to pass SB 311 and expand access to similar support services for other at-risk youth.

Eliza Bently, Resident of Hamden

This testimony is in support of Raised Bill 311 Section 2, HB 5328, and SB 7, emphasizing the need for equity in school funding and the abolition of suspensions for nonviolent behavior. Recalling from her experience in Hamden and comparing it to Texas, she noted the persistent disparities in per-pupil funding across districts, noting that minoritized communities continue to face an "education debt" that accumulates year after year. She urged increasing the foundation aid to \$16,525 in 2027, indexed to inflation, and called for adjustments to fiscal guardrails to ensure resources reach underfunded schools, students, teachers, and staff. The author stressed that while Connecticut has a \$300 million general fund surplus and a \$4.1 billion Budget Reserve Fund, inequities persist, resulting in cuts to educational offerings, higher local taxes, and limited opportunities for students, and argued that allocating existing funds more equitably is both possible and morally necessary.

Catrina Bienaime, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

This testimony argues that current suspension practices push students out of school rather than helping them improve. Drawing from personal experience, the author explains that suspensions for non-violent behaviors caused her to fall behind academically and increased stress. This testimony advocates for restorative practices and shorter suspension periods, while also highlighting disparities in discipline rates among marginalized students. The following testimonies are from the same organization as well as share stories and similar points.

Ivan Cadet, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Bianka Camerise, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Tamica Durand, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Stephanie Forestal, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Mckaylie Francis, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Elin Lita, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

Kymiyah Willis, Student, Hearing Youth Voices

CJ Parker, Education Justice Youth Organizer, Hearing Youth Voices

Hearing Youth Voices supports SB 311 by highlighting the harmful long-term impacts of exclusionary discipline (like suspensions and expulsions). Drawing on research and personal experience, the author states that these practices contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline and fail to address underlying issues, often pushing students further behind. The author talks about the fact that students benefit more from support and conflict resolution than being removed from school. They also question why discipline is equated with lost access to

education. This testimony urges policymakers to adopt more supportive approaches and invest in school funding to improve outcomes.

Mendi Paca Blue, President & CEO, Fairfield County's Community Foundation

Fairfield County's Community Foundation emphasizes the urgent need to address the large number of disconnected or at-risk youth in Connecticut—nearly 20% of young people. The testimony highlights the importance of coordinated supports such as childcare, transportation, and mental health services to help these individuals succeed in education and careers. The Foundation argues that the bill would strengthen data sharing and provide critical resources, ultimately benefiting both young people and the state's long-term workforce and economy.

Christopher Brechlin, Director of Data & Digital Systems, COMPASS Youth Collaborative

The author explains that the bill would expand opportunities to better serve disconnected youth in Hartford. This testimony states that the legislation would improve data sharing and analysis, helping nonprofits and state agencies identify service gaps and strengthen collaboration. It also emphasizes the need for holistic, wraparound approaches to support young people both in and outside the classroom, calling the bill an important step in addressing a widespread youth disconnection crisis.

Jesse Buccolo, Deputy Director, Norwalk ACTS

This testimony emphasizes support and talks about the importance of cross-sector data sharing to better understand and support disconnected youth. The testimony argues that current data systems are limited and fail to capture the role of nonprofit organizations in improving youth outcomes. By enabling secure linkage between nonprofit and state data, the bill would help communities identify services, align resources, and improve outcomes, ultimately advancing equity and opportunity for young people across Connecticut.

Chavon Calitri, Parent, ConnCAN

The author testified in strong support of Section 2 of Raised Bill 311, limiting out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior and reducing reliance on exclusionary discipline. The author notes the personal impact of such policies, sharing that her nephew received a five-day suspension for a nonviolent offense, which removed him from school without addressing the underlying issue or helping him learn from it. The author emphasized that school discipline should keep students engaged and connected to their education while promoting improvement, and she expressed hope that the bill will lead to more constructive and supportive approaches to student behavior.

Genesis Cubilette, Marketing & Communications Coordinator, CT Black & Brown Student Union

This testimony is in support of Section 2 of SB 311, advocating for limits on out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior. The author argues that current discipline practices disproportionately impact Black and Brown students and punish normal adolescent behavior. Touching on the importance of dignity, restorative practices, and supportive resources, the

author urges the committee to pass the bill to keep students in school and promote more equitable, effective discipline.

Mary Cordero Cuevas, Student, Stamford, CT

This testimony is in support of SB 311, sharing personal experience as a high school student who became disengaged due to academic and social pressures. The author credited the Domus School Engagement Program for helping her reconnect to school through a family advocate who provided emotional support, goal-setting guidance, and connections to resources (i.e. afterschool programs and volunteer opportunities). The advocate also assisted her family and provided transportation, removing barriers to consistent school attendance.

Brian Donahue, Founder, NOT JUST US

This testimony comes from NOT JUST US, a volunteer group who advocates for students and their families to be able to have their educational, nutritional, emotional, recreational, financial, medical, and spiritual needs met. The testimony supports SB 311, arguing that students need support and guidance rather than exclusionary discipline for nonviolent behavior. Out-of-school suspensions can harm students by fostering rejection, disengagement, and negative outcomes, while restorative practices better promote accountability, empathy, and learning. The author also discusses disparities, noting that students of color and those with disabilities are disproportionately affected, and urges the adoption of more equitable, supportive approaches.

Marc Donald, CEO, Catalyst CT

The author emphasizes the need to align the bills goals with the operational realities of community-based organizations serving disconnected youth. This testimony stated that nonprofits are facing growing demand, increasing mental health needs, and limited capacity, making adequate staffing, training, and resources essential for delivering effective social-emotional learning (SEL). The author stressed that program fidelity and consistent implementation are critical to achieving meaningful outcomes; this requires stable, multi-year funding rather than short-term grants. Testimony also noted that while expanded data sharing could improve services, nonprofits need support to build the infrastructure to use that data effectively.

Shineika Fareus, Executive Director, CT Black & Brown Student Union

This testimony supports Section 2 of SB 311, which eliminates out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior and limits exclusion to cases of physical harm or credible threats. She argues that current suspension practices disproportionately affect Black and Brown students, criminalize normal adolescent behavior, weaken relationships, and increase dropout risk, resulting in both social and fiscal costs. The author says that true school safety comes from supportive measures—counselors, social workers, and restorative practices—that keep students engaged and accountable and urges the committee to pass the bill to promote equity, dignity, and belonging in schools.

Anghy Idrovo, Policy Director, CT Black & Brown Student Union

This testimony is arguing that out-of-school suspensions (especially for non-violent, subjective behaviors) disconnect students from learning and harm their long-term outcomes. The author talks about research showing that suspensions reduce graduation likelihood, fail to improve school climate, and disproportionately impact Black and Latino students. Exclusionary discipline can deepen trauma, contribute to “school pushout,” and increase risks of high school dropout. The author supports the bill’s effort to limiting suspensions for non-violent behavior. The following testimonies come from the same organization and have similar points as well as personal stories.

Morgan Lindsay, Student / Member, CT Black & Brown Student Union

Shanlay Claude, Student / Member, CT Black & Brown Student Union

Javaris Spencer, Student/ Member, CT Black & Brown Student Union

Aniya Wilks, Student / Member, CT Black & Brown Student Union

C. Senecal & J. McBride, Public Policy Team, Greater Hartford Gives

This testimony states that effectively reengaging disconnected youth requires strong data systems, collaboration across sectors, and sustained investment in community-based programs. They endorse the bill’s provisions to expand data sharing through DataLinkCT and to create a Disconnected Youth Investment Grant program to fund organizations helping youth reconnect to education and employment. Coordinated partnerships and data-sharing initiatives—like the Hartford Data Collaborative—has improved understanding of youth needs and strengthened support systems, especially for Black and Latino youth facing systemic barriers. They argue that expanding these models statewide could improve outcomes, reduce disconnection, and generate significant economic benefits.

Valeryn Fernandez, Program Manager, Center for Latino Progress

The Center for Latino Progress strongly supports this bill, stating that it addresses a statewide crisis by helping disconnected and at-risk youth reengage in education and employment. The author emphasizes that the bill’s data-sharing provisions, limits on suspension, and creation of a Disconnected Youth Investment Grant Program would promote more equitable, evidence-based support systems while strengthening the state’s workforce. Increased funding would allow community programs to expand services like workforce development and absenteeism prevention for youth facing challenges such as poverty, homelessness, and justice system involvement. Personal testimonies from former participants further illustrate how these programs provide mentorship, career exploration, academic support, and safe spaces.

Robert Goodrich, Executive Director, RACCE Inc.

In this testimony, the author states that exclusionary discipline contributes to “school push-out” and fails to improve school safety. He cites research showing that out-of-school suspensions can worsen school environments. This testimony also states that strong relationships and restorative, in-school approaches are more effective. The testimony highlights progress in Connecticut in reducing suspensions through policy changes, but notes that disparities persist. The author argues that S.B. 311 would further limit the use of out-of-school suspensions,

strengthen student protections, and promoting more effective, relationship-based approaches to discipline to help students to stay engaged in school.

Kira Hanner, Law Student, Quinnipiac University School of Law

This testimony strongly supports Section 2 of Raised Bill 311, arguing that out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior are harmful, inconsistently applied, and disproportionately impact students of color. Drawing on personal observations, she explains that removing students from school can lead to isolation, shame, and missed opportunities. The author advocates for restorative, in-school approaches that address the root causes of behavior to provide emotional support, stating that students need guidance—not exclusion—to grow. The author urges lawmakers to prioritize keeping students in school and to pass the bill to reduce reliance on suspensions.

Gail Heath, Admin Assistant, CABE

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) raises concerns about additional discipline-related mandates, particularly the reduction in allowable in-school suspension days and the need for districts to repeatedly update policies. CABE supports parts of the bill that fund wraparound services and the Disconnected Youth Investment Grant. However, they express concerns about unclear definitions (such as “intent” in violent behavior), potential student data privacy risks, and unfunded requirements which could put strain on already limited district resources.

Mory Hernandez, Director, Restorative Practices, Catalyst CT

In this testimony, the author supports Raised Bill SB 311 because these approaches are essential to making bill reforms work. The author encourages SEL & Restorative Practices to give students the social skills to stay connected in the school.

James Jeter, Executive Director, Full Citizens Coalition

This testimony strongly supports Section 2 of SB 311, arguing that out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior can push students out of school and can contribute to long-term harm (including involvement in the justice system). The author states that these disciplinary practices are applied inconsistently, while also disproportionately affecting Black, Latino, and other marginalized students. The practices also weaken student-teacher relationships and harm mental health. The author gives research showing that exclusionary discipline does not improve school safety or behavior and carries significant economic and social costs. There is support in this testimony for the bill’s focus on limiting suspensions, reducing their length, and expanding restorative practices to keep students engaged in learning.

Alex Johnson, CEO, Capital Workforce Partners

The author of this testimony considers this legislation as a critical step to addressing the more than 100,000 disconnected or at-risk youth in Connecticut. Testimony emphasizes the need for sustained, coordinated investment into the Disconnected Youth Investment Grant Program to scale proven programs that reconnect young people to education and employment. The

author recommends strengthening the bill with dedicated funding, cross-agency coordination, data-sharing infrastructure, and support for alternative education pathways. He also supports limiting out-of-school suspensions, arguing that keeping students connected to school is key to preventing long-term disconnection.

Emily Knox, Research & Policy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children
Carmen Clarkin M.P.H., Special Assistant for Strategic Initiatives

This testimony states that youth disconnection is a cross-system issue requiring coordinated solutions across education, workforce, and social services. It highlights the importance of improved data-sharing (through DataLinkCT) to better understand and address youth outcomes. The testimony also stresses that data must be actionable and equity focused. The author also argues that exclusionary discipline for nonviolent, subjective behaviors contributes significantly to disconnection, disproportionately impacts marginalized students, and is linked to worse academic and health outcomes. They support the bill's efforts to limit out-of-school suspensions and expand community-based supports as key steps to keeping students connected and improving long-term outcomes.

Zoe, Masters, Staff Attorney – School Justice Project, Center for Children's Advocacy

This testimony supports SB311 but urges revisions to better limit exclusionary discipline, which disproportionately impacts Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, and disabled students. They argue that the bill should clarify when out-of-school suspensions are allowed, preserve strong protections for younger students (pre-K–2), and ensure suspensions are only used as a last resort after other interventions. They also call for broader reforms, including improved data transparency, stronger civil rights enforcement in schools, and support for HB5328 to address Islamophobia in schools.

Bob McCullough, VP Growth Strategy, Hazel Health

This testimony is in support of SB 311, urging inclusion of provisions to expand school-based mental health services via telehealth. He argues that accessible, no-cost telehealth improves attendance, reduces disciplinary issues, and helps address the needs of Connecticut's large population of disconnected youth. Citing data from Hazel Health's programs, the testimony emphasizes that early mental health intervention leads to better academic and long-term life outcomes.

Michael Michno, Staff Member, CT State Community College- Manchester

The author supports Section 2 of SB 311, arguing it would reduce harmful outcomes of out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior. Drawing on personal experience, the author describes how vague disciplinary policies lead to lost learning time, damaged student-teacher relationships, and disproportionate impacts on Black, Brown, and neurodivergent students. This testimony states that limiting exclusionary discipline and increasing support services would help students stay engaged and succeed academically.

Melissa Moore, Waterbury Parent, ConnCAN

This Connecticut parent supports Section 2 of SB 311, emphasizing the negative impact of out-of-school suspensions on students with mental health needs. The author shares that suspensions worsened her son's condition, contributed to school refusal, and made him feel unwanted, (despite behaviors being part of his IEP). This testimony states that supportive, in-school approaches lead to better outcomes for students and families, while suspensions can also create a financial strain for working parents.

Aaron Morabito, Employee, CT State Community College

This testimony shows support for multiple education bills including SB 311, emphasizing the need for well-funded, safe, and supportive school environments. The author states that adequate resources, smaller class sizes, and access to materials are essential for student success and college readiness. The author also discusses the importance of addressing discrimination, school safety, and limiting exclusionary discipline, advocating for supportive approaches that keep students engaged rather than pushing them out of school. Overall, he stresses investing in students' academic and personal development to improve long-term outcomes and interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

Michelle Nold, Executive Director, CTData Collaborative

This testimony particularly supports Section 1 of this bill, which would require annual data sharing between nonprofits and the state's DataLinkCT system. The author insists that this is essential to better understand as well as serve disconnected youth. The author states that the current data lacks insight into nonprofit services and their impact. Regular, integrated data would help identify which programs are effective, improve service alignment, and support better outcomes for youth over time. The testimony also recommends expanding eligibility in another section of the bill to include workforce development organizations.

Luis Ortiz, Director of Community Engagement & Family Partnerships, ConnCAN

This testimony supports SB 311, emphasizing that students must remain in the classroom to succeed. The testimony highlights that many suspensions in Connecticut are for non-violent, subjective behaviors, which remove students from learning and increase the risk of disconnection and dropout—especially for Black and Brown students. The author states that the bill strikes a balance by reserving suspensions for serious safety concerns while promoting alternatives that keep students engaged.

Shakshi Patel, Special Projects Coordinator, RACCE Inc.

This testimony strongly supports Section 2 of SB 311. The author highlights that current policies disproportionately affect Black and Brown students, remove them from learning, and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. The author states that suspension due to vague categories like "defiance" or dress code violations lead to lost instructional time, disconnection, and long-term negative outcomes. The testimony advocates for reducing maximum suspension days, expanding restorative practices, and prioritizing supportive, in-class approaches to promote student success.

Lauren Peckham, Graduate Student, Quinnipiac Law

The author from this testimony, a law student from Moodus, Connecticut, testified in support of Raised Bill 311. The author shared her own experience of being suspended during finals for spreading rumors in high school, which harmed her grades, transcript, and college prospects. While acknowledging her mistakes, she emphasized that exclusion worsened the impact and failed to account for her personal circumstances, including mental health challenges. This testimony argued that restorative approaches would hold students accountable without derailing their education and urged the committee to prioritize supportive, inclusive discipline over exclusion.

Asheley Pilate, Student, Star Academy

In this testimony the author stresses the need to address disconnected youth before disengagement becomes entrenched. She described how Star Academy targets the 80 lowest-performing middle school students by transforming classrooms into hands-on, project-based learning spaces with small cohorts, integrating math, science, English, and social studies. The program helps students see themselves as capable learners, restoring confidence and ambition. The author noted that the \$1 million per-site investment is cost-effective prevention, enabling struggling students to succeed, and urged the committee to support SB 311 to expand this proven model.

Jonel R., Parent Advocate, ConnCAN

In this testimony the author talks about the negative impact of school suspensions. They explained that suspensions cause students to fall behind academically and feel labeled as “problems” rather than understood as individuals who made mistakes. Drawing from personal experience, Jonel emphasized that supportive approaches (where students are heard and guided) promote growth and better equip them to handle challenges, whereas punishment alone isolates and discourages students. They urged the committee to prioritize support over exclusion.

Hector Rivera, President & CEO, Our Piece of the Pie Inc.

The author testified in strong support of S.B. 311 on behalf of OPP and the 119K To Zero Collective, emphasizing their proven track record in re-engaging Connecticut’s most at-risk youth. This testimony discusses OPP’s holistic, relationship-based coaching and workforce development programs, which have transformed thousands of young lives. Testimony stressed that the 119K To Zero Collective is ready to immediately scale these programs statewide, serving as an effective vehicle for the Disconnected Youth Investment Grant (DYIG) Program. The author urged meaningful investments—including up to \$50 million for DYIG, a \$4 million Youth Service Corps grant, and data partnerships—arguing that S.B. 311, with these revisions, would empower the state to eliminate youth disconnection while maximizing social and economic returns.

Omayra Robledo, Advanced Year MSW Student, Uconn School of Social Work

This testimony showed support for both S.B. 311 and S.B. 7, emphasizing the impact of educational inequities on youth in under-resourced communities. Taking from her personal experience and work in Hartford, she explained how factors like limited school funding, housing instability, community violence, and lack of access to resources contribute to student disengagement. She highlighted that S.B. 7 addresses systemic inequities while S.B. 311 focuses on reconnecting youth who have already fallen behind, arguing that both prevention and intervention are necessary.

Lauren Scopaz Daunais, SVP Collective Action, CT Cradle to Career Coalition

This testimony speaks on to the importance of coordinated, data-driven approaches to addressing disconnected youth. Representing a network serving 125,000 children across multiple Connecticut cities, the testimony highlighted the need for schools and community organizations to work together to support students. She stressed that linking data across education, labor, and nonprofit service providers is essential to understanding which supports are most effective and to improving outcomes for youth. The author urged the committee to support SB 311 and prioritize data-sharing systems that enable better alignment of resources and services for students.

Calitchi Serrano, Resident, Hartford, CT

This testimony in support of Section 2 of SB 311, emphasizes the need to reduce out-of-school suspensions for nonviolent behavior. The author argues that current discipline policies disproportionately impact Black and Brown students and remove them from the classroom for minor or subjective infractions. This leads to lost learning time, weakened trust in educators, and negative mental health effects. Speaking about her own daughter's experience, she described how students are often unfairly labeled and excluded rather than supported. The testimony urged the adoption of restorative approaches that prioritize student growth and equity, calling on lawmakers to support SB 311 to keep students engaged and in school.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union

This author testified in support of Section 2 of Senate Bill 311, emphasizing the need to reduce exclusionary school discipline and its role in the school-to-prison pipeline. The author highlighted that nearly half of suspensions in Connecticut are for nonviolent and subjective behaviors. These disciplines disproportionately impact Black and Latino students, contributing to significant racial disparities.

Mercedes Blye, Mother, Read School

The author described significant resource challenges and urging increased funding. As a parent of two children with different educational needs, the author emphasized the difficulty of ensuring both receive adequate support in an underfunded system. Comparing her experience to schools in the Danbury area, she highlighted disparities in resources, including concerns about outdated food, frequent weather-related closures, limited transportation, safety issues, and insufficient staffing. This testimony calls on lawmakers to provide more funding to improve conditions for students and enable teachers to effectively meet diverse learning needs.

Anonymous 68, Anonymous 68

This testimony states support for SB 311.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Anonymous 652, Anonymous 652

Anonymous 653, Anonymous 653

These testimonies talk about parental rights when it comes to schooling and vaccines. The author(s) claim that these rights to decided what's best for your kids should not have the government involved.

Anonymous 866, Anonymous 866

This testimony states that the legislation is redundant and worthless.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Thomas Burr, Public Policy Manager, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) CT

This testimony talks about the connection between school discipline and student mental health. The author warns that exclusionary practices (like suspension) can worsen trauma and disengagement, particularly since behavioral issues are often symptoms of underlying mental health conditions. This testimony urges the committee to prioritize therapeutic, in-school interventions and to consider recommendations from the SEEK Coalition to better support vulnerable students.

Dale Clark, College Career Coordinator, New London Public Schools

The testimony highlights that student absenteeism is driven largely by poverty-related challenges such as mental health issues, homelessness, and financial pressures, as well as a lack of engaging career pathways in traditional schools. Drawing on decades of experience, the speaker states that connecting students to workforce training, certifications, and job opportunities can improve attendance and long-term success, especially for disconnected youth. The author advocates for increased funding for vocational programs, partnerships, transportation, and after-school opportunities, arguing that greater investment in education is essential to expand career readiness and reduce poverty.

Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair, SEEK

SEEK supports Section 2 of SB 311, arguing that exclusionary discipline undermines schools' duty to educate all children and often increases misbehavior and alienation. They speak about the disproportionate impact on Black students and students with disabilities, as well as the

concerning number of suspensions for very young children. SEEK advocates for limiting exclusions, particularly for students in grades K–2, ensuring trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate interventions, and expanding referrals to support services for students with serious behavioral issues, rather than relying on suspension or expulsion.

John Flanders, President, SEEK

SEEK argues that exclusionary discipline undermines schools' responsibility to educate students and often worsens behavior rather than improving it. They advocate for therapeutic, in-school interventions instead. They also raise concerns about the language in the bill regarding "violent behavior" and criticize limits on trauma-informed services, arguing such supports should apply to all students. Finally, SEEK highlights significant racial and disability-based disparities in discipline data in Connecticut and calls for systemic reform to address what they view as a serious and inequitable crisis.

Scott Gaul, Chief Data Officer, Office of Policy & Management.

This testimony opposes Section 1 of SB 311, arguing it is unnecessary because DataLinkCT already provides a secure, legal process for nonprofits to access youth outcome data. The author warns that the proposal could bypass established safeguards, risk data privacy and duplicating existing efforts already underway. This testimony also raises concerns that the bill is unfunded, lacks clarity about what data would be shared (and for what purpose) and does not align with a previously developed state plans for safely expanding youth data access. This author urges caution on the need to protect sensitive youth data and avoid undermining existing systems already designed to ensure confidentiality and compliance with state and federal laws.

Christina Ghio, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) supports limiting out-of-school suspensions and argues that they should only be used when necessary for safety, as exclusion can be harmful for development and can reinforce negative self-perceptions. OCA also notes significant racial disparities, with Black and Hispanic students disproportionately disciplined. This testimony also states that the bill may weaken recent protections for young children and that the definition of "violent behavior" is too broad, potentially leading to inappropriate discipline of very young students. Finally, OCA supports the creation of a grant program to help reconnect disconnected youth to education and employment.

Melanie Lane, Executive Director, CASBHC

This testimony supports SB 311 and emphasizes the importance of student mental health. The author states that it is a key factor in preventing youth disconnection and supporting academic success. The author urges the bill to add provisions to expand access to school-based telehealth mental health services through a statewide program. This testimony outlines a structured, sustainable model involving the Department of Public Health, qualified providers, and Medicaid-aligned funding to ensure no-cost access for students. Overall, the testimony argues that expanding equitable, school-based mental health services is essential to improving outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Agata Lawska, Managing Attorney, Connecticut Legal Services

Connecticut Legal Services supports SB 311 and urges protections to reduce exclusionary discipline, particularly for young children. They emphasize that suspensions disproportionately impact students of color and those with disabilities. The author also states that early-grade suspensions are increasing despite research showing they harm academic and long-term outcomes without improving school safety. The testimony argues that suspensions for Pre-K through grade 2 should remain limited to cases involving “serious physical harm” (or be eliminated entirely), since young children often act impulsively rather than with intent. They also call for earlier interventions, such as special education evaluations and trauma-informed supports, to keep students in school.

Brendan Murphy, Retirement & Special Education Specialist, CEA

The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) opposes SB 311 as written, though it supports parts of the bill that expand student supports, community connections, and wraparound services. This testimony raises concerns about changes to suspension policies, particularly the definition of violent behavior as only “intentional,” arguing that student behavior often reflects dysregulation and a need for support rather than punishment. The CEA also believes that reducing the maximum suspension lengths is premature without first ensuring that schools have the correct systems in place to support high-need students.

Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent, New London Public Schools

In this testimony New London Public Schools urged Governor Lamont, legislators, and committee members to strengthen Connecticut’s Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula and increase state investment in public education for FY2027 and beyond. The testimony states that current ECS funding does not keep pace with inflation, rising operational costs, or student needs. This forces districts to cut staff and programs, wide achievement gaps, and overburden local taxpayers. The author called for a 6% immediate increase in ECS with annual inflation-based adjustments, full funding of the Special Education Excess Cost Grant, restoration of magnet school funding, and expansion of SEED grants to support in-district special education. The testimony emphasized that these investments are essential to uphold students’ constitutional right to a free, equitable, and high-quality education.

Alicia Strong, Co-Director, New Britain Racial Justice Coalition

The author, a fourth-grade teacher in New Britain and co-director of the New Britain Racial Justice Coalition, testified in support of SB 7, SB 311, and HB 5328, emphasizing the need for equitable education funding and supportive school policies. This testimony argued that public schools are often unfairly criticized for financial mismanagement despite being required to serve all students (including those with high needs) which necessitates significant resources and specialized staff. The author called for increased and accelerated funding through SB 7, along with adjustments to reflect real costs in high-needs districts. Testimony also supported SB 311’s efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline, noting its disproportionate impact on

marginalized students, Additionally, she advocated for strong measures to address anti-Muslim bias in schools through HB 5328.

Cecil Tengtenga, Associate Director, CT AHEC

The Connecticut Area Health Education Center (CT AHEC) submitted testimony in support of multiple education bills, including S.B. 7, S.B. 34, S.B. 35, S.B. 139, and related infrastructure measures. This testimony emphasizes that equitable school funding, strong special education support, and modern facilities are essential to student success and community wellbeing. Citing on its statewide work in schools, CT AHEC highlighted the importance of increasing the ECS funding to reflect real costs, fully reimbursing special education expenses, and investing in student supports (such as mental health services, STEM programming, and career pathways). The organization also stressed the value of safe, updated school infrastructure and recommended leveraging existing school-based programs and partnerships to implement these reforms effectively. The author urges lawmakers to take comprehensive action to strengthen educational equity and long-term workforce development.

Reported by: ReAnna Jean Adams

Date: 4/2/2026