

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5323 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION

Title: STATUTES.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.: 380

***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

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to improve student well-being and strengthen school systems through a comprehensive approach to health, safety, accountability, and academic success. It emphasizes early identification and prevention of eating disorders by requiring evidence-based screenings in school health centers and creating groups to develop long-term strategies for awareness and treatment. The bill also promotes safer, more accountable schools by expanding eligibility for armed security personnel, requiring financial audits for transparency, and aligning extracurricular participation with academic standards. Additionally, it supports students and educators through a mentorship program for school administrators and therapeutic arts grants, highlighting the importance of professional development and holistic student engagement.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute (1) requires the eating disorder screening tool to be given to 6-12 graders (rather than 9-12 graders) and makes a technical change; (2) redrafts academic standards provision to specifically link to CAS and CIAC standards; and (3) adds the provision on the CEPCB deadline.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Department of Education, Commissioner, Charlene M. Russell-Tucker: generally supports the goals of HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of addressing student mental

health, well-being, and school climate through coordinated, statewide efforts. Her testimony highlights the value of initiatives like early identification, educator support, and holistic programming, while also noting the need to ensure that implementation is feasible and aligned with existing resources and practices. She underscores that comprehensive, collaborative approaches developed with input from educators, families, and stakeholders are critical to effectively supporting students' academic and social-emotional needs.

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, Christian Duborg, Melvette Hill, Rosemary Lopez, Thomas Nuccio, Werner Oyanadel, and Tianyi Zhang: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that early screening in school-based health centers is a critical step in identifying and addressing eating disorders in children. The testimony also recommends refinements to the bill's language to ensure effective implementation and strengthen statewide coordination around prevention, treatment, and awareness efforts.

Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Christina D. Ghio, JD, CWLS: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of early identification and prevention of eating disorders as a critical step in protecting children's mental health and well-being. Her testimony highlights that proactive, school-based screening and coordinated efforts can help address gaps in detection and improve outcomes for vulnerable youth.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

House Majority Leader Jason Rojas: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the bill's comprehensive approach to improving student outcomes across Connecticut. His testimony highlights the importance of maintaining clear and consistent academic eligibility standards for extracurricular activities, noting that such standards reinforce accountability and prioritize student achievement. He also underscores that the bill's broader provisions work together to support student well-being and strengthen school systems statewide.

Senate Minority Leader – 30th District, Stephen Harding: supports HB 5323, highlighting the bill's broad efforts to improve student well-being, school safety, and accountability within Connecticut's education system. His testimony emphasizes the importance of addressing multiple school-related issues in a comprehensive manner, including mental health, academic standards, and oversight, to better support students and communities.

Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, Executive Director, Yvette Goorevitch: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that the bill, particularly the school administrator mentorship program will provide essential training, guidance, and professional development to strengthen school leadership. She highlights that better-supported administrators are critical to improving school climate, staff retention, and overall student outcomes.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Administrative Assistant, Heath Gail: opposes Section 8 of HB 5323, expressing concern that imposing statewide academic eligibility standards for extracurricular activities undermines local control. The testimony argues that such decisions are best left to local school districts, which can tailor policies to their students' needs.

Clinical Psychologist, Douglas W. Bunnell, Ph.D., FAED, CEDS: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that early identification through evidence-based screening is critical to improving outcomes and ensuring timely intervention for youth. His testimony highlights that eating disorders are serious mental health conditions that are often underdiagnosed, and earlier screening in schools can help address this gap.

Connecticut Association of School Based Health, Director, Board Chair, Heather Dawson, DNP, FNP: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that requiring evidence-based screening in school-based health centers will improve early identification and intervention for eating disorders among students. Her testimony highlights the important role these health centers play in providing accessible, preventative care to youth.

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of early identification and intervention for student mental health and related needs, particularly through school-based supports. His testimony underscores that proactive screening and coordinates efforts can help address gaps in care and improve outcomes for vulnerable students.

Connecticut Education Association, Teacher Development Specialist, Kate Field: supports HB 5323 particularly the provision establishing a school administrator mentorship program emphasizing that it will provide critical support, training, and professional development to strengthen school leadership.

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), President, John Flanders: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that early identification and coordinated supports particularly for eating disorders and student mental health are critical to improving outcomes for children, including those with special education needs.

CT parent Alyssa Kanagaki Greenleaf BA,MHS,PA-C,DipACLM: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that early education and prevention, particularly through nutrition and food education initiatives are critical to addressing disordered eating in youth. She highlights that promoting healthy relationships with food at a young age can help reduce the risk of eating disorders and improve long-term health outcomes.

Connecticut Food Sovereignty Collective, Co-Founder, Meg Hourigan: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of the bill's holistic food education provisions in promoting healthier relationships with food among students. She highlights that integrating nutrition, food systems, and disordered eating education can help prevent eating disorders and support long-term student health and well-being.

The CT Association of School Based Health Centers, Inc., Executive Director, Melanie Wilde-Lane: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that school-based health centers are well-positioned to implement early screening and intervention for eating disorders. Her testimony highlights that expanding these preventive services will improve access to care and help identify at-risk students sooner, leading to better health outcomes.

Yale School of Public Health, Health Policy student, Jasmine Li: supports HB 5323 particularly Sections 1–3 emphasizing the importance of early screening, education, and coordinated efforts to address eating disorders among youth. Her testimony highlights that

implementing evidence-based tools and statewide initiatives can improve early detection and promote long-term prevention and awareness.

CT Advisory Council for Administrator Professional Standards (CACAPS), Co-Presidents of the CFSA and Chairwomen, Fran DiFiore and Patricia Phelan: support HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to student well-being that includes early identification of eating disorders, educator support, and school system improvements. Their testimony highlights that the bill's combination of health initiatives, leadership development, and accountability measures will better equip schools to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs.

Connecticut Association of Schools, Executive Director, Glenn Lungarini, Ed.D.: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that the bill promotes student well-being and strengthens school systems through its focus on mental health, leadership development, and academic standards. His testimony highlights the importance of coordinated, statewide approaches to support both students and educators while maintaining consistency across districts.

Education Committee of CASBHC, Board Member and Chair, CHR: Child & Family Service Director, Caitlyn Ogilvie, LCSW: supports HB 5323, emphasizing that school-based health centers play a critical role in early identification and intervention for student health needs, including eating disorders. Her testimony highlights that expanding evidence-based screening and preventive services in schools will improve access to care and help students reach their full potential.

Jameel Arts & Health Lab, Founding Co-Director, Dr. Nisha Sajjani: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the value of therapeutic arts programs in improving students' mental health and emotional well-being. Her testimony highlights that integrating arts-based interventions in schools can support prevention, healing, and engagement, particularly for students experiencing trauma or mental health challenges.

Daniel Hand High School, Principal, Anthony Salutari, Jr: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to student well-being that includes mental health supports, leadership development, and clear academic expectations. His testimony highlights that the bill's combined initiatives will help schools better support students both academically and emotionally, while strengthening overall school environments.

CT NOFA, New Haven, Director of Advocacy, Kimberly Stoner, PhD: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of the bill's holistic food education provisions in promoting healthy relationships with food and preventing eating disorders among students. Her testimony highlights that integrating nutrition, food systems, and hands-on food education can improve both student health and long-term well-being.

Town of Litchfield, Resident and Selectman, Jodiann Tenney: supports HB 5323, particularly the provisions requiring an audit of the former Region 6 and Litchfield school districts, emphasizing the importance of financial transparency and accountability. Her testimony highlights that addressing outstanding financial issues is critical to ensuring fairness for member towns and restoring public trust in school governance.

Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK), Special Education Advocate, Secretary, and Member, Stacey Tie: supports HB 5323, emphasizing the importance of early identification and intervention for student mental health and related needs, particularly for children with disabilities. The testimony highlights that strengthening school-based supports and coordinated statewide efforts can help address gaps in care and improve outcomes for vulnerable student populations.

Anonymous 174 Anonymous 174

Anonymous
Mercedes Blye
Lori Lindenmuth

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors, Executive Director, Fred Balsamo: opposes Section 8 of HB 5323, arguing that imposing uniform academic eligibility standards for extracurricular activities raises significant concerns and could negatively impact student participation and local decision-making authority.

Connecticut High School Coaches Association, Executive Director, Lenard J. Corto, CMAA: opposes Section 8 of HB 5323, arguing that the proposed academic eligibility standards for extracurricular activities raise significant concerns about student participation and could create unintended barriers for student-athletes.

Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), Executive Director, Glenn Lungarini, Ed.D.: opposes Section 8 of HB 5323, expressing concern that mandating academic eligibility standards for extracurricular activities would undermine existing CIAC policies and limit local flexibility. He argues that current standards are already effective and that additional statutory requirements are unnecessary and could create unintended challenges for schools and students.

Bridgeport Board of Education, Vice Chair, Joseph Sokolovic: opposes HB 5323, expressing concern that certain provisions particularly those related to audits and financial obligations could impose unfair burdens on local school districts and municipalities. He argues that the bill may create unintended fiscal and administrative challenges without adequately supporting affected communities.

Anonymous 653 Anonymous 653

Anonymous 652 Anonymous 652

Anonymous 866 Anonymous 866

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENTS:

New London City Council, Christopher Clouet: raises concerns about HB 5323 particularly the provisions related to auditing and financial responsibility arguing they could unfairly burden municipalities and create unintended fiscal consequences for local communities.

Reported by: Mackenzie Frenette

Date: 3/31/26