

# Government Oversight Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** SB-424 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING OVERSIGHT OF PLANS PURSUANT TO SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

**Title:** NEEDS IN THE STATE.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/10/2026

**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:

Rep Comey, Rep Poulos

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill expands oversight, reporting, and support measures for students with 504 Plans. It requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to collect, publish, and receive data on 504 plans, while mandating multiple reports to the legislature, including on complaints, service ratios, and program effectiveness. It also establishes a working group to review 504 plan processes, strengthens the authority of the Office of the Educational Ombudsperson to investigate discrimination claims, and applies anti-discrimination standards to complaints. Additional provisions call for improved coordination in special education services, updates to data systems, evaluation of Medicaid-reimbursable school services, and workforce planning to increase the availability of social workers and counselors.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Carves out the watchdogs from being required to report to OPM, and only requires them to report to the committee of cognizance (lines 19-23, 25-29).

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

### **Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education:**

Commissioner Russell-Tucker testified with concerns/opposition to the bill. The testimony raised issues regarding funding requirements, data system limitations, and legal conflicts, particularly around FERPA, duplication of oversight through the Ombudsperson, and potential interference with existing federal IDEA responsibilities and state authority.

### **Tanya Hughes, Executive Director, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities:**

Director Hughes testified with concerns on the bill. She stated that the bill's language could overly limit CHRO's ability to handle disability discrimination complaints and recommended narrowing the provision to only cases involving denial of a free appropriate public education while preserving broader protections.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Jason Adler, High School Counselor, Waterford Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill, stating that the bill would improve oversight and transparency of 504 plans and address growing administrative burdens on school counselors.

**Barbara Beebe, Director of School Counseling, Northwestern Regional Middle and High School, Region 7 Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill. She stated that the bill would improve oversight and transparency 504 plans, citing rising caseloads, lack of state data, and increasing administrative burdens on school counselors.

**Jessica Cintron Henry, School Counselor, Trumbull High School:** Testified in support of the bill. She emphasized that increasing 504 caseloads without limits or oversight are placing strain on counselors and can conflict with their role as student advocates, and she supported improved data tracking and state-level oversight.

**Curtis Darragh IV, Middle School Counselor, Westside MS Academy, Danbury Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill. He highlighted inconsistencies across districts, lack of statewide oversight, and the need for clearer guidance on 504 eligibility, while supporting improved data collection and standardized practices.

**Emily B. Dickson, School Counselor, J.F. Kennedy Middle School:** Testified in support of the bill. She noted that growing 504 caseloads are adding significant workload demands on counselors and emphasized the need for better data collection and state oversight.

**Sarah Evans Zalewski, School Counseling Program Coordinator, Central Connecticut State University:** Testified in support of the bill. She emphasized that increasing 504 plan demands and unclear guidance are creating challenges for counselors and supported improved oversight and data collection.

**John Flanders, President, Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut:** Testified in support of the bill. He supported the bill's intent to expand oversight of Section 504 but raised concerns about the lack of enforcement authority, limited data requirements, and insufficient resources, and recommended stronger accountability measures and inclusion of parents in the process.

**Doug Frasier, School Counselor, A.I. Prince Technical High School, Connecticut**

**Technical Education and Career System:** Testified in support of the bill. He emphasized that inconsistent practices across districts and lack of state guidance have created confusion and legal risk in 504 plan implementation and supported standardized oversight and clearer procedures.

**Lisa Kilcourse, Elementary School Counselor, Connecticut School Counselor**

**Association Co-Chair:** Testified in support of the bill. She highlighted that 504 case management places significant time burdens and conflicts on counselors and supported increased oversight and data collection.

**Agata Lawska, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Connecticut Legal Services, New Haven**

**Legal Assistance Association:** Testified in support of the bill with concerns. They supported increased oversight and data collection but warned the bill could create confusion for families and stressed the need for clear processes and coordination between agencies.

**Sarah Magilnick, School Counselor, Staples High School:**

Testified in support of the bill. She highlighted the rapid increase in 504 plans and the lack of statewide oversight, noting that the growing administrative burden on counselors reduces time for direct student support. She supported the bill's provisions for data collection, state oversight, and workforce assessments to improve consistency and better support students.

**Quinn Meehan, Community Organizing and Policy MSW Intern, Universal Health Care**

**Foundation of Connecticut:** Testified in support of the bill. They emphasized gaps in implementation of 504 plans and supported greater oversight to ensure equitable access for students.

**Virginia D. Messina, Director of School Counseling and Admissions, Norwich**

**Technical High School:** Testified in support of the bill. She highlighted the increasing number of 504 plans and lack of state oversight, noting the growing administrative burden on counselors and supporting data collection and oversight to improve the system.

**Jessica Odlum, Former Connecticut School Counselor, Current College Access**

**Counselor:** Testified in support of the bill. She argued that 504 plan management is a legal compliance responsibility that is improperly placed on school counselors, creating confusion and burden without proper authority or training. She supported increased data collection and oversight to improve consistency and better structure the system.

**Matthew Rosen, School Counselor, Wilton High School, Connecticut School Counselor**

**Association Government Relations Chair:** Testified in support of the bill. He highlighted the increase in 504 plans and resulting workload on counselors, as well as inconsistencies across districts. He supported the bill's oversight, data collection, and standardization efforts to improve equity and allow counselors to focus on student support.

**Casey Sollazzo, School Counselor, Newtown:** Testified in support of the bill. She emphasized the increasing burden of 504 plan case management on counselors, which limits time for direct student support, and supported greater oversight and data collection to improve the system.

**Joe Trahan, School Counselor, Lewis S. Mills High School:**

Testified in support of the bill. He highlighted the lack of structure and consistency in 504 plan oversight compared to IEPs, noting this creates inequities, administrative burden, and confusion for students and families. He supported increased oversight and standardization to improve equity and compliance.

**M. Jeffry Spahr, Chair of the Legislative Committee, Connecticut State Advisory**

**Council for Special Education:** Testified in support of the bill. He supported data collection, increased oversight, and workforce assessments as key steps to better address student needs.

**Anne Zinn, School Counseling Department Head, Norwich Free Academy:** Testified in support of the bill. She stated that the growing number of 504 plans, combined with a lack of statewide oversight, has led to inconsistencies across schools and increased burdens on counselors. She emphasized that the bill would improve data collection, accountability, and support systems, while helping ensure more consistent and equitable implementation of 504 plans.

**Anonymous 7, School Counselor:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony stated that increased oversight, data tracking, and the potential creation of a dedicated 504 coordinator role would improve consistency and equity across districts. It emphasized that current practices place school counselors in unclear and burdensome roles, and that the bill would better align responsibilities.

**Cynthia Bryan, School Counselor/Department Liaison, Wethersfield High School:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony stated that 504 plans have increased significantly without clear guidance or oversight, creating inconsistencies and added workload for counselors.

**Michele Cozzolino, School Counselor, J.F. Kennedy Middle School:** Testified in support of the bill. She noted the growing number of 504 plans has increased workload for counselors and supported improved oversight and data collection.

**Kate Dias and Joslyn DeLancey, President and Vice President, Connecticut Education Association:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony supported increased oversight, data collection, and workforce assessments, noting counselor shortages and high caseloads, while also raising concerns about expanding the Ombudsperson's investigatory role.

**Andrew A. Feinstein, Legislative Chair, Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut:** Testified in support of the bill's intent but with concerns. The testimony recommended clarifying legal language, better aligning the bill with federal laws, and ensuring it does not limit existing legal remedies for disability discrimination.

**Kiley Flynn, School Counselor, Griswold High School:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony stated that increasing 504 plans and limited oversight have created added pressure and workload for counselors, and supported improved data collection and state oversight.

**Gail Heath, Administrative Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education:** Testified in opposition to the bill. The testimony raised concerns about FERPA compliance, increased administrative burden, and insufficient resources to implement the bill's requirements.

**Rachel Jalbert, School Counselor, Brookfield Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony stated that increasing 504 plans and lack of oversight have added workload and reduced time for direct student services and supported improved data collection and statewide guidance.

**J. Seth Korn, Director of School Counseling and Student Testing, Newington Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony supported increased oversight and statewide data collection, noting the lack of current tracking for 504 plans. It emphasized that assigning counselors as 504 coordinators creates conflicts and reduces time for direct student services, and that the bill would help restore proper roles and improve support systems.

**Jeanette Luna and Madeline Peling, Senior Data and Policy Analyst and Data Analyst, School and State Finance Project:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony emphasized the need for improved data transparency, stronger state oversight, and clearer guidance on 504 plan implementation, noting that better data and analysis would help ensure appropriate identification, resource allocation, and student support.

**Drew Michael McWeeney, Assistant Professor and Program Chairperson, CT State Community College–Norwalk:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony highlighted the need for stronger data transparency, oversight, and accountability in 504 plan implementation, emphasizing improved statewide data tracking, clearer complaint processes through the ombudsperson, workforce assessments.

**Eileen Melody, School Counselor, Mansfield Public Schools:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony emphasized the sharp increase in 504 plans and how expanding case management responsibilities are pulling counselors away from direct student support, highlighting the need for stronger oversight, clearer structure, and additional resources to manage growing demands.

**Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Director, Medical-Legal Partnership at the Yale Child Study Center, Center for Children’s Advocacy:** Testified in support of the bill with concerns. The testimony emphasized the need for strong state-level protections amid weakening federal oversight, while recommending clearer enforcement authority, preservation of CHRO complaint access, structured complaint procedures, expanded data collection, and increased school counselor and social worker capacity.

**Sara J. Renzulli, Professor of Counselor Education, University of Connecticut:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony highlighted the rapid growth of 504 plans, lack of statewide data and oversight, and challenges due to limited funding and unclear expectations, emphasizing that counselors should not serve as case managers and supporting increased data tracking, oversight, and workforce assessments.

**Sarah McKinney, School Counselor, Regional School District #4:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony highlighted the rising number of 504 plans, noting that about 21% of students are now identified, and emphasized the burden placed on counselors without a designated coordinator, supporting increased data tracking, oversight, and staffing assessments.

**Stacey Tie, Special Education Advocate, Special Education Equity for Kids Advocacy Committee:** Testified in support of the bill with recommendations. The testimony emphasized the need for disaggregated demographic data in Section 504 complaint reporting to identify disparities, and highlighted the importance of addressing school social worker shortages to meet growing student mental health needs.

**Susan Yankee, Parent/Advocate:** Testified in support of the bill. The testimony described inequities experienced by students on 504 plans compared to IEPs, including lack of accommodations, communication, and transition support, and emphasized the need for stronger oversight, consistency, and inclusion of 504 data and services.

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

None

**Reported by: Reported by: Clerk- Greg Wolff  
Assistant Clerk- Mike Hamann**

**Date: 3/20/26**