



STATE OF DELAWARE
STATE COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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The Honorable John Carney,
Governor

John McNeal, Director
SCPD

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 20, 2024

TO: Delaware Senate

FROM: Susannah Eaton-Ryan, Chairperson
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'S. Eaton-Ryan'.

RE: Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 304 (June 1, 2024)

The SCPD has reviewed the SS1 for SB 304¹ and have the following comments:

- School bullying prevention and criminal youth gang detection training hours are reduced from 3 hours every 3 years to 1 hour every 3 years, and new employees must complete 1 hour of training within 1 year of employment. Suicide prevention training hours are reduced from 4½ hours every 3 years to 3 hours every 3 years, and new employees must complete 1 hour of training within 1 year of employment. Teen dating violence and sexual assault training hours for school administrators, nurses, and counselors serving students in grades 7 through 12 are reduced from 2 hours every 3 years to 1 hour every 3 years, and new employees must complete 1 hour of training within 1 year of employment.
- The rationale given for these reductions is that “school personnel have expressed concerns related to the time burden and relevance of required trainings.”
- The bill does generally require the Department of Education in consultation with Child Protection Accountability Commission and the Division of Family Services of the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families, to review its trainings every three years and update them as needed.
- Per the Department of Education (DOE) Bullying Report for 2023², LEAs reported 1,344 alleged bullying and cyberbullying incidents. This is undoubtedly an undercount of bullying

¹ <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/141397>

² <https://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2022-2023-Annual-Bullying-Report.pdf>;

events, as about 40% of bullying goes unreported.³ Nevertheless, this is a 7% increase from the prior year, when 1,257 incidents were reported.

- Suicide was the third leading cause of death in people aged 10-24 in Delaware in 2021.⁴ The American Society for Suicide Prevention strongly encourages regular training for all school personnel in suicide prevention. It notes that “training for teachers and others who interact with students daily are in a prime position to recognize the signs of suicide risk and to make appropriate referrals.”⁵
- Per the Department of Education 2023 Annual Report on Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Assault, assaults were up almost 40% between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023.⁶ This report notes that in January 2024, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council also began to partner with representatives from CPAC and DDOE to update its non-academic training on teen dating violence and sexual assault. This new training will be available for the 2024-2025 school year.
- The Government Accounting Office issued a report in 2021 highlighting the increase in hostile behaviors in schools.⁷ It noted:

Exposure to such harassment and victimization can have lifelong consequences for students’ overall well-being if left unaddressed. These may include: depression, anxiety, involvement in interpersonal violence or sexual violence, substance abuse, poor social functioning, and poor school performance, including lower grade point averages, standardized test scores, and poor attendance.

- Given the data demonstrating increased incidences in bullying, suicides and teen dating violence and sexual assault in Delaware schools, the fact that such behaviors are under-reported, and that these issues are acknowledged to be pervasive and widespread across the country,⁸ it seems odd the legislature would allow the DOE to reduce staff awareness and education on these matters. How can these trainings be “irrelevant?”

The SCPD opposes this bill.

Thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact the SCPD if you have any questions or comments regarding our observations.

cc: Marissa Band, Esq., DLP

³ <https://www.wested.org/wested-bulletin/insights-impact/current-trends-promising-practices-in-bullying-prevention/>

⁴ https://www.datocms-assets.com/12810/1707241399-delaware_2023_state_fact_sheet.jpg

⁵ <https://afsp.org/suicide-prevention-in-k-12-schools/>;

⁶ <https://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/TDV-2022-2023-Final.pdf>, Page 6.

⁷ GAO, Students Experiences with Bullying,,Hate Speech, Hate Crimes and Victimization In Schools, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104341.pdf>

⁸ Schools can face a host of liability issues for failure to identify and address these concerns. The GAO report highlights a number of enforcement actions against schools by federal authorities.