

The Connecticut General Assembly



Friday, May 29, 2015

Contacts: Dan Uhlinger
860-240-8575

TONG LEADS PASSAGE OF BILL REFORMING LAWS PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM CHILD ABUSE, SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN SCHOOLS

Rep. William Tong, co-chairman of the Judiciary Committee, led the House of Representatives Friday in passing a bill he introduced that will help protect children from child abuse and sexual misconduct in Connecticut schools.

The legislation, approved by a 138-1 vote, enhances reporting and training requirements for school employees, increasing penalties for failure to report as mandated and increasing accountability for boards of education and the Department of Children and Families concerning mandated reporting. The bill now goes to the Senate.

“As the new House chair of the legislature’s Judiciary Committee this year, this was the first bill that I wanted to introduce and lead to passage. That’s how important it was to me,” Tong (D-Stamford, Darien) said.

“The bill arose out of an incident in Stamford involving a principal, an assistant principal, teachers and other administrators that unfortunately brought a great black eye to the City of Stamford,” Tong said. “Unfortunately, we’re seeing other incidents around Connecticut like this where school personnel are not immediately reporting suspected cases, which has made this legislation all the more important.”

Under the legislation, H.B. 6186, An Act Protecting School Children, employees who have good reason to suspect student abuse, but fail to report it to superiors, could face three years in prison and \$3,500 fines if convicted. Those convicted of such charges would be banned from seeking similar employment elsewhere in Connecticut.

The bill would also create a charge of conspiracy to fail to report incidents, to address cover-ups. School employees would also have to take mandatory training courses on the issue every three years.

"One of the problems we saw in Stamford was that training was not being done," Tong said.

Criminal charges were leveled at Stamford High Principal Donna Valentine and Assistant Principal Roth Nordin involving failing to report a suspected sexual relationship between former English teacher Danielle Watkins, of Norwalk, and a male student. That relationship also included marijuana smoking in the school parking lot.

"It is my fervent hope that this bill will send the strongest message possible that Connecticut will not tolerate the failure to report child abuse and sexual misconduct in our schools. Failure to report incidents is not only morally wrong, it is legally wrong and can result in the loss of a career," Tong said.