

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1856

As Reported by House Committee On:

Education

Title: An act relating to excused absences from school for search and rescue activities.

Brief Description: Excusing student absences for state-recognized search and rescue activities.

Sponsors: Representatives Morell, O'Brien, Talcott, Miloscia, Quall, Carrell, Rockefeller, Bush, Cox, Pflug, Pearson and Woods.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/21/01 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- With the approval of a student's parent and school principal, a student may be excused from school for up to five days each year to participate in state-recognized search and rescue activities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Talcott, Republican Co-Chair; Anderson, Republican Vice Chair; Haigh, Democratic Vice Chair; Cox, Ericksen, Pearson, Rockefeller, Santos, D. Schmidt and Schual-Berke.

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, with some exceptions, all children between the ages of 8 and 18 must attend school. Children who attend public school may be absent under limited conditions. The school district must excuse children who are physically or mentally unable to attend school. They must also excuse students who are absent at the parents' request for a purpose that has been agreed upon by the parents and school authorities. However, the school cannot excuse absences that are deemed to have a seriously adverse effect on the student's educational progress.

The chief law enforcement officer of each city or county is responsible for local search and rescue operations. These operations are conducted under the auspices of state and local plans that have been adopted by the local county or city governing board. The operations are coordinated by the local director of emergency management. Under certain conditions, the state will compensate local jurisdictions for the costs associated with search and rescue activities.

Summary of Bill:

With the approval of a student's parent and school principal, a student may be excused from school for up to five days each year to participate in state-recognized search and rescue activities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Search and rescue programs have a vital role in augmenting the work of law enforcement officers. Search and rescue volunteers are called upon to assist law enforcement officers in their efforts to search for lost children and Alzheimer's patients, gather evidence, and rescue lost hikers and climbers. The Explorer Search and Rescue program allows students to participate in search and rescue operations. In some cases, students have been able to receive college credit for their activities. Many students have had their lives enriched as a result of these opportunities. This legislation will help legitimize student requests to be excused from school for a limited amount of time to participate in search and rescue activities.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Morell, prime sponsor; Grant Smith, Explorer Search and Rescue; Jessica Towle, Explorer Search and Rescue; and Jennifer Shutt, Explorer Search and Rescue.