

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Sophie Walsh 271-3469

SB 456, establishing the commission for children's futures.

Hearing Date: March 11, 2026

Time Opened: 10:36 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:51 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Rochefort, Prentiss and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: Senators Avard and Birdsell

Bill Analysis: This bill establishes a commission to study issues related to the public health and safety of children in the state.

Sponsors:

Sen. Sullivan

Sen. McGough

Sen. Pearl

Rep. Rice

Rep. Nelson

Rep. Notter

Who supports the bill: Sen. Sullivan, Sen. Pearl, Cory Stone, and Melissa Brogle.

Who opposes the bill: Elaine French, Priscilla Dube, and Tami Lanzillo Zeimetz.

Who is neutral on the bill: Jenny O'Higgins & Abby Rogers (DHHS) and Ashley Krivosh.

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Victoria Sullivan, Senate District 18

- Senator Sullivan explained that this bill came forward as a result of constituents bringing a number of issues to her attention.
- Senator Sullivan wants to bring these issues together to be examined by stakeholders to identify trends and ways to make this is a better state for our children.
- Senator Sullivan reviewed the subject areas that will be covered by the Commission.
- The Commission will review trends on individualized education plans (IEPs) and what other appropriate supports may be provided to children in school.
- The Commission will review the use of pharmaceuticals with psychoactive effects and reports of diagnosed mental health issues in youth.
- The Commission will review the proportion of students who know of someone who has experienced a mental health crisis.

- The Commission will review changes in the prevalence of childhood cancer, long-term disease, autism spectrum disorder, and attention deficit disorder.
- The Commission will review the amount of mental health services provided to minors and associated trends with such services. Senator Sullivan emphasized that these are generational issues that will carry on if they are not addressed.
- The Commission will review the prevalence of criminal street gangs as defined in RSA 651:6, as well as the amount and impact of incidents in public schools. Senator Sullivan noted that there were 1,100 incidents of violence last year in Manchester schools and emphasized that while these issues are not being discussed, we need to ensure public schools remain a safe place for students.
- The Commission will review truancy and attendance rates in public schools, as well as the possible predictors of mental health truancy.
- The Commission will review childhood exposure to pornographic content. Senator Sullivan emphasized that this topic is also not discussed currently.
- The Commission will assess youth homeless rates and examine how mental health crises can both contribute to and be caused by youth homelessness.
- The goal of this Commission is to analyze different data sets, identify patterns and trends, discover how certain factors may be impacting or causing others, and appropriately address these factors.
- By assessing these issues collectively, we have the best chance of finding the most optimal path forward to a long-term positive change for the health and mental health of children.
- Senator Rochefort asked if the Commission would need membership from state departments to receive data. He noted that some of this information would likely be housed in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Insurance Department, and the Department of Education.
- Senator Sullivan explained that the Oversight Commission for Children's Services requests departments to come in and present their data, which is what she was envisioning for this Commission.
- Senator Rochefort confirmed that Senator Sullivan feels like the Commission has enough authority to get the information they need, and she confirmed. She explained that while some of this data will have to be found, there is a lot that we already have. This is how we can bring these data sets together and see if the state is doing what is best for children.
- Senator Long used the Manchester school district as an example and asked if Senator Sullivan is confident that the Commission can get data from them without having membership in the Commission.
- Senator Sullivan confirmed and explained that school data is already reported to the state. She said the Commission would be able to invite different people to

present data and have a conversation, noting that law enforcement has come in to present to the Oversight Commission for Children's Services.

Jenny O'Higgins & Abby Rogers, Department of Health and Human Services

- Ms. O'Higgins stated that the Department shares Senator Sullivan's goal and passion to preserve children's health and safety.
- There are already established commissions that could collaborate with this work.
- The Oversight Commission on Children's Services serves as a multi-stakeholder oversight body focused on the coordination and improvement of children's services across state agencies. The Commission's key responsibilities include reviewing and promoting accountability across child serving systems, evaluating programs, and promoting best practices.
- The Children's Systems of Care Advisory Commission is aimed to improve outcomes for children and families through multi-sector membership. Key focus areas include advising the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education on the system of care implementation.
- Ms. Rogers noted that this bill includes looking at childhood cancer.
- The Department works with a variety of commissions, partners, and advocates to ensure everyone has updated data. A lot of this data is reviewed and used by the New Hampshire State Health Assessment and State Health Improvement Plan Advisory Council.
- Ms. Rogers noted that there are also commissions reviewing environmentally triggered chronic illness and the public health impacts of PFAS that the Department works with to provide information.
- These active commissions have the statutory ability to establish subcommittees to address emerging issues or additional subject areas. Ms. O'Higgins noted this could be one path to ensure legislative efforts are collaborative and not duplicative.
- Ms. O'Higgins noted that the Department is happy to provide data and expertise to the proposed Commission, although they are not named as a member.
- Senator Rochefort noted that it seems like there is a variety of people working on these issues, but not necessarily talking to each other about it. He thinks the goal of this legislation is to pool resources and data to go more in-depth in regard to children specifically.
- Ms. O'Higgins emphasized that the Department wants to ensure efforts are not being duplicated and that they would be happy to work with Senator Sullivan.