

Senate Education Committee

Ryan Meleedy 271-4151

SB 210, establishing a study committee to study the issue of school bullying.

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ward, Sullivan, Abbas, Prentiss and Altschiller

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill creates a study committee to study the issue of school bullying.

Sponsors:

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Altschiller

Sen. Prentiss

Sen. Gannon

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Watters

Sen. Long

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Ricciardi

Rep. N. Germana

Rep. Newell

Who supports the bill: 30 People signed in support of SB 210. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (ryan.meleedy@gc.nh.gov).

Who opposes the bill: 22 People signed in opposition of SB 210. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (ryan.meleedy@gc.nh.gov).

Who is neutral on the bill: 1 Person signed in neutrality on SB 210. To see the full list of sign-ins, please email the committee aide (ryan.meleedy@gc.nh.gov).

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Fenton

- Senator Fenton introduced Senate Bill 210, explaining that the bill establishes a study committee on school bullying to identify best practices for prevention efforts and consider whether additional legislative action is warranted to address the ongoing issue of bullying that affects many New Hampshire students.
- Senator Fenton established that bullying has a detrimental effect on children's physical, mental, and academic well-being.
- Senator Fenton referenced recent events in Keene, New Hampshire as the genesis for this legislation because it is unclear if schools have the resources, policies, and training necessary to address and prevent bullying adequately.

- Senator Fenton addressed the gravity of the impacts of bullying and described Senate Bill 210 as a step toward protecting New Hampshire students and providing for a more inclusive learning environment

Mackenzie West

- Ms. West expressed her support for Senate Bill 210, explaining that queer and marginalized populations encounter higher instances of bullying in school, and this contributes to higher rates of suicide and depression.
- Ms. West explained that by establishing a committee to investigate the issue, future legislation will be more reflective of the best punishment practices for curbing cycles of violence.

Linds Jakows -- 603 Equality

- Linds Jakows expressed support for Senate Bill 2010, citing school bullying's disproportionate effect on LGBTQ students.
- They advocated for the study committee to serve as a vehicle to pursue a restorative justice approach to combat bullying and effectively replace traditional modes of punishment for bullying. They expressed that restorative justice is a more productive approach because individuals must willingly participate for the method to be effective in holding the community accountable.
- They defined restorative justice by citing the Center for Justice and Reconciliation and provided that restorative justice is an approach to resolving conflict and repairing the harm caused by a crime instead of applying punitive measures like detention, suspension, or expulsion.
- They explained different modes of restorative justice practices and highlighted the effectiveness of the various approaches.
- They expressed that restorative justice prevents students from falling into the school-to-prison pipeline. They also expressed that teachers benefit from restorative justice practices because classroom behavior is improved.
- They acknowledged that for the program to be successful, the study committee needs to understand what constitutes restorative justice and identify who is qualified to facilitate it.

Neutral Information Presented:

Ann Marie Banfield

- Ms. Banfield explained that she generally supported the concept of Senate Bill 210, but believed there needs to be an amendment to identify more community stakeholders to provide input to the study committee. Ms. Banfield expressed her support for including families impacted by bullying and those who have left public school due to bullying on the study committee.

- Ms. Banfield referenced a situation in Keene where teachers resigned from their roles due to behavioral problems within the Keene public schools.
- Ms. Banfield expressed that the bill offers bipartisan action to address the root causes of bullying.
- Ms. Banfield explained that legislative action needs to come from the state level because the local school boards have not been able to address the issue adequately, and the impacts of bullying are felt statewide.
- Senator Sullivan explained that Governor Sununu established a task force in 2018 focused on school safety which included bullying. Senator Sullivan continued that the task force produced guidelines for local schools to adopt but does not believe local school administrations have properly enforced the guidelines. Senator Sullivan asked if Senate Bill 210 has the enforcement ability to ensure school administrations are following established law. Ms. Banfield responded that current law allows for administrators who actively ignore instances of bullying to be sued but believed the process is financially prohibitive. She said that the study committee should consist of representatives from many districts and employees of the Department of Education who understand the bullying problem.
- Senator Sullivan asked if an additional charge of the study committee should include the study of teachers being bullied in the classroom. Ms. Banfield expressed that she would support including teachers in the study and referenced the Keene educators' situation. Ms. Banfield expressed concern about the effectiveness of disciplinary practices administrators adopt.