
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Vermont Agency of Education

Subject: H.931, Section 6

Date: May 12, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Section 6 of H.931. The Agency **does not support** changes to the membership structure of the Advisory Council on Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying (HHB) Prevention in Schools at this time. However, in recognition of Senate Education's interest in advancing language on this issue, the Agency and The Vermont Network worked collaboratively to develop the compromise language reflected in Section 6. We believe this language preserves an appropriate balance of educational practitioners and advocacy organizations. We encourage the Committee to take testimony on the proposed changes from VPA, VSA, VSBA, and VT-NEA, as these changes will directly impact the educators who are tasked with implementing this important work.

The HHB Council was established pursuant to Act 129 of 2012 to advise the Agency and support statewide efforts to prevent harassment, hazing, and bullying. Historically, the Council has experienced challenges meeting regularly, leadership turnover, and difficulty achieving quorum. Between June 2023 and February 2025, the Council did not meet. In February 2025, the Council was reestablished under Secretary Saunders and began work on updating the HHB model policy and procedures. This work is well underway, and Council has already provided key insight, recommendations and revisions to model policy. Feedback delivered by the Council in 2025 has, in part, shaped the Agency's larger strategy for HHB prevention. Because of these ongoing efforts, the Agency does not believe that shifting the Council's makeup will meaningfully advance its work and could lead to further administrative barriers or disfunction.

Ongoing Work Related to HHB Prevention

The Agency began advancing a comprehensive, statewide HHB strategy in January 2026, including:

- Updated model policies (prevention + response)
 - Investigations and Response Policy expected to be published in spring 2026



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- Prevention (including Restoration) Policy expected to be published for public comment by September 2026
 - includes significant input from public comment received on existing (investigations and response) policy in 2025
 - Stronger training, curriculum, and family engagement requirements with improved state-level support
 - RFP for comprehensive professional development series, expected to be released in May 2026
 - State-provided annual training series for HHB intervention and best practices, investigator training, and impact of HHB on development
 - Improved data systems and practices specific to HHB incidents
 - Including expanded data collection, training, and reporting
 - Development of statewide technical resources
 - Template communications, professional development opportunities, model protocols;
 - Student and community-facing resources, visual workflows and improved data guidance, and;
 - Special considerations for certain student populations, such as students with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ students.
 - Expanded focus on school climate and student engagement as key elements of prevention
 - Stronger connections to SEL instruction and educator preparation programs as key elements of sustainable, inclusive school climates

For these reasons, the Agency respectfully requests that the legislature allow the Council to continue its work with stability and focus during this critical period of policy development and implementation. Vermont schools, students, and families need a statewide HHB system that is clear, consistent, and effective. The Agency remains committed to working collaboratively with advocacy organizations, educators, students, and community partners to strengthen prevention, improve responses, and ensure all students have access to safe and supportive learning environments.

