

TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Vermont Agency of Education

Subject: Response to Testimony related to HHB and Chronic Absenteeism

Date: April 28, 2026

H.930 is about fixing attendance systems. H.930 advances attendance work by:

- Establishing consistent statewide definitions for attendance
- Improving data quality and reporting
- Shifting focus to early intervention, not punishment
- Creating a coordinated, prevention-oriented approach to absenteeism

HHB (Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying) is critically important, but does not belong in this bill and should be addressed through a separate, comprehensive strategy. Amendments that have been proposed or discussed include:

- Adding HHB-related absence categories into attendance law, resulting in attempts to use attendance data to measure HHB impact
- Expanding the size and scope of responsibility for the HHB Prevention Advisory Council

Potential Risks

- Data would be inconsistent and unreliable and does not adequately measure HHB impact
- Creates confusion for schools and families
- Does not capture the complexity of HHB situations

Possibly resulting in weakening of both attendance policy and HHB efforts

Key Recommendations for H.930 and H.931

- Keep H.930 focused on attendance
- Do **not** add HHB-related absence categories (the Agency recommends removing all categories of excused and unexcused absence, instead addressing them in the model policy)



- Do **not** embed HHB policy into attendance statute
- Do **not** consider revisions to size or scope of HHB Prevention Advisory Council absent a more comprehensive review of 16 VSA 570 et al
- Continue strengthening attendance systems and early support

Current HHB Approach and Strategy

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
 - 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
- Improved data systems and practices specific to HHB incidents
 - Including expanded data collection, training, and reporting
- Expanded state support and technical assistance, including templates, professional development opportunities, and model protocols
- Expanded focus on school climate and student engagement as key elements of prevention

Why This Matters

- Attendance is an outcome, not the root cause
- HHB is a complex school climate issue requiring targeted solutions
- Combining them in statute risks addressing both poorly instead of each well

