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## TESTIMONY

**Testimony To:** Senate Committee on Education

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Vermont Agency of Education

**Subject:** Response to H.931, Expansion of HHB Prevention Advisory Council

**Date:** April 30, 2026

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AOE has recently provided testimony on H.930 (chronic absenteeism) and H.931 (miscellaneous education bill) related to proposed inclusions impacted Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying (HHB) prevention and response. **The Agency and VT Education Associations continue to have strong reservations about making any changes to the Council membership at this point in time.** However, the following language acknowledges the request of the advocacy organization while preserving an appropriate balance of educational practitioners and other interested organizations.

### **Council Membership**

A survey recent survey conducted by the Council chair (provided on record at the Council meeting on Monday, April 27) showed that Council members are interested in more educator voice, not less. By contrast, the proposed additional members represent advocacy groups, not educators or practitioners, which creates a significant imbalance of non-educator-based roles for the Council that do not carry expertise or experience with the other requirements of HHB statutes and/or investigations and/or other education requirements.

**If membership must be expanded, we suggest instead including a representative of educators such as Title IX coordinators, special educators, or designated HHB coordinators.**

### **Council Scope**

Vermont provisions for HHB prevention are codified in law in 16 VSA 570 et al, and include definitions and requirements for HHB prevention, reporting, and response, and establishes the Council as an Advisory body to the Secretary of AOE in matters of HHB prevention.

Under state law, AOE is established as the executive Agency assigned oversight of the provision of equitable, high-quality education, including



access to safe and healthy schools. **The proposed responsibilities of the Council identified in sections (b) and (d) expand the scope of the Council beyond advisory and will likely create confusion, duplication, and potentially conflicting direction to schools.**

While the responsibility to develop, publish, and maintain the model policy and procedures is assigned to the AOE, the Council provides an important vehicle for periodic review and consult on both. **We suggest that the proposed responsibility of the Council outlined in section (c) be adjusted to reflect a review of the model policy every three years**, which is consistent with other recent requirements for model policy review in H. 930.

### Suggested Language

(1) Membership. The Advisory Council shall be composed of the following members:

(A) the Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association or designee;

(B) the Executive Director of the Vermont School Boards Association or designee;

(C) the Executive Director of the Vermont Superintendents Association or designee;

(D) the President of the Vermont-National Education Association or designee;

(F) the Executive Director of the Vermont Human Rights Commission or designee;

(G) the Executive Director of the Vermont Independent Schools Association or designee;

(H) a member, appointed by the Vermont Education Equity Collective; ←Creates an additional position to advise on equity needs related to HHB from practitioners, educators, and education leaders.

~~(I) a member, appointed by the National Association of Social Workers - Vermont Chapter;~~ ← Suggest striking and replacing with a rep from VT School Counselor's Association

~~(J) a member, appointed by the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights;~~ ← Suggest striking and replacing with a rep from VT Special Education Administrators

(K) a student member, appointed by the Chair of the Advisory Council;

(L) a student member, appointed by Outright Vermont;

~~(M) a member, appointed by the Commission on Women;~~ ← Suggest striking, VEEC can represent equity concerns and act as conduit for Commission on Women and Office of Racial Equity.



(N) a member, appointed by the Office of Racial Equity; ← Suggest striking, VEEC can represent equity concerns and act as conduit for Commission on Women and Office of Racial Equity.

(O) a member, appointed by the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; and

(P) a parent or caregiver member, appointed by the Vermont Family Network.

\*\*Please note, a larger membership will create larger quorum requirements.

(2) Duties. The Advisory Council shall:

(A) Meet at least four and not more than 12 times per year.

(B) Review and advise on coordination of school and statewide activities relating to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing, and bullying.

(C) Review the model harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention policies developed by the Secretary every two-three years, beginning in 2026, and recommend updates to the policies as necessary.

(D) Review and advise on resources on hazing, harassment, and bullying prevention and response to school professionals.

(E) Annually solicit input from students, parents, and schools on hazing, harassment, and bullying.

(F) Notwithstanding 2 V.S.A. § 20(d), annually on or before January 15, the Council shall submit a written report to House and Senate Committees on Education, which shall hold a joint legislative hearing each legislative session to review the report. The Council shall also submit the report to the State Board of Education at the same time.

(3) Compensation and reimbursement. Members of the Council shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 12 meetings of the Council per year.

## Education Strategy for 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
  - 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

