



Legislative position

The mission of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association is to promote excellence in public education and school board governance through leadership, service and advocacy.

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SUBJECT: Position Paper – House Bill 1276 (Rep. Katharine Watson)

DATE: June 15, 2015

PSBA POSITION ON House Bill 1276

Child Protective Services Law clarifications for volunteers and technical updates

PSBA Position: Support with Amendments

On behalf of the 4,500 elected officials who govern the commonwealth’s public school districts, **we request your support for House Bill 1276**, sponsored by Representative Katharine Watson. **PSBA fully supports House Bill 1276 with Amendment A01965 sponsored by Rep. Kristen Phillip-Hill, Amendment A02114 by Representative Todd Stephens and Amendment A01885 by Representative Katherine Watson.**

Children are among the most vulnerable when abuse is concerned and PSBA is committed to ensuring appropriate safeguards are implemented to keep schools safe. After the intense work of many to ensure the end product of 2014 contained provisions that were in the best interest of children, especially in our schools, and that the provisions all worked together to capture what PSBA believed to be the intended individuals required to report child abuse within school environments, the association supported a number of the bills that became the new CPSL. Our members have worked diligently over the last few months to implement the new legal requirements for clearances and reporting applicable to both employees and volunteers.

As implementation began, many parties became aware of questions, concerns, and inconsistencies, and it became clear that a “clean-up” bill would be necessary. With that in mind, PSBA strives to be a resource in tightening the intent of the law passed in 2014. House Bill 1276 addresses some of the concerns our members voiced with respect to clarifying which volunteers and others participating in school activities are required to obtain clearances and report suspected child abuse. We seek not to adjust the scope of the current CPSL, but rather to provide changes that make the law clearer and more consistent. **That is what Amendment A01965 (Rep. Phillips-Hill) does--ensures that the various intertwining components of the law that impact schools and their employees continue to fit together like a puzzle with all of its pieces.**

PSBA would like to extend sincere thanks to former school board director, Rep. Kristen Phillips-Hill, for her work in sponsoring these changes that clarify the intent of the CPSL and provide consistency for schools and their employees. Furthermore, we appreciate the willingness of other House members and staff to engage in meaningful conversations to review and refine the CPSL.

We are happy to support this bill with Amendment A01965, Amendment 02114 and Amendment A01885 in the interest of protecting children and hope that this remains a “clean-up” process. We look forward to continuing to work with you on these and other important issues affecting public education this session.

Summary:

House Bill 1276 (Rep. Watson) makes clarifying changes to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) that was adopted last session as the result of the Task Force on Child Protection and two years of discussions in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The bill clarifies existing statute with respect to individuals required to obtain background checks and definitions, including “direct contact with children,” “independent contractor,” “person responsible for a child’s welfare,” and “school employee” and adds a definition for “routine interaction.”