

Senate Education Committee

Kat Bourque 271-3093

SB 45, requiring a course in civics for high school graduation.

Hearing Date: January 24, 2017

Time Opened: 9:00 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:19 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Reagan, Ward, Watters and Kahn

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Giuda

Bill Analysis : This bill provides that a one-half year civics course shall be required for high school graduation.

Sponsors :

Sen. D'Allesandro

Sen. Watters

Sen. Bradley

Rep. P. Long

Who supports the bill: Representative Seidel

Who opposes the bill: Carl Ladd (New Hampshire School Administrators Association)

Who is neutral on the bill: No one

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator D'Allesandro

Prime Sponsor

- This bill provides that one be required to take a half year of a civics course in order to graduate from high school.
- Knowledge of government and government operations is at an all-time low.
- He added that, generally, people do not understand the governmental process.
- Senator D'Allesandro taught civics at two different high schools throughout his life. These were half year courses that were fully integrated into the curriculum.
- He added that many school districts have created a series of courses in curriculum that do not get into the fundamentals of education.
- This bill has come forward in some form on numerous occasions. It has often been on the Senate floor and then turned down.
- Senator D'Allesandro believes that there is a fundamental need for this course and that it could spur more participation at the local level of government.
- Senator Reagan asked to confirm if this requirement was already set forth in rules. Senator D'Allesandro stated that it is currently incorporated in other types of courses and is not an independent requirement.
- Senator Kahn asked if a civics course at the equivalent of one half of a credit could be embedded within a full credit history course. Senator D'Allesandro stressed that

he would like the course to be called a civics course and to be taught for half a year with the student receiving half a credit for the course. He added that the course could be embedded at the discretion of the Department of Education (DOE.) However, he does not want to take the focus off of civics. How that is accomplished is something that DOE can discuss. He stressed that the main focus needs to be the duty and responsibility of a citizen and the structure of state and federal government.

- Senator D'Allesandro noted constituents frequently calling his office for issues that are on the federal level. He stressed the importance of the general public having better knowledge of how the government works.
- Senator Kahn asked if, on line 19, Senator D'Allesandro would consider adding "or equivalent" after one half unit of credit. Senator D'Allesandro stated that it was difficult to understand what that language means. An equivalent would need a definition. Ultimately, he would like to see a civics-specific course.
- Senator Kahn asked about the use of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services Exam that is struck out of the bill and whether or not it may, in fact, be a validating measure as to students' understanding of the civics content. Senator D'Allesandro stated that he believes the exam is a good gage. When people in his district ask for help in becoming a U.S. citizen, he recommends they learn English and be prepared for the exam by studying the Constitution. He believes that the exam's difficulty is at a middle level.
- Senator Kahn added that another suggestion he received regarding this legislation was relative to the effective date. Should changes be necessary under this bill, there might be more time needed in order to implement them. Senator D'Allesandro added that the changes could take place in the next academic year.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition :

Carl Ladd

NH School Administrators Association

- Mr. Ladd agrees with the intent of the bill but believes it is a mandate to school districts that would take away local control.
- Civics is already being taught in conjunction with U.S. history across the state.
- In order to implement this bill, we would have to remove a social studies elective.
- Many schools meet these requirements through virtual learning, so this could place an additional burden on local school districts.
- In general, Mr. Ladd is in support of the concept, but questions the implementation.
- Mr. Ladd added that he is a former social studies teacher.

Neutral Information Presented: N/A

Future Action: Pending