

HCS HB 2555 -- BRAILLE INSTRUCTION

SPONSOR: Ruth

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 11 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative Oversight Committee by a vote of 12 to 0.

This bill requires all students who are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and have vision impairment that adversely affects their educational performance to receive instruction in braille unless an evaluation determines that instruction in braille is not appropriate.

This bill is similar to SB 681 (2018).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that learning braille is necessary for the visually impaired to be successful in education and employment. Additionally, a child may have a condition with which they can read without braille as a child, but that worsens with age to the point they need braille in adulthood. Such people should have the opportunity to learn braille as a child.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Ruth; Gary Wunder; Shelia Wright; Missouri School Administrators Coalition; Missouri National Education Association; and Roger Crome.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that vision impairment is a spectrum, and higher-functioning low-vision children may not need braille if they can read with assistive technologies. Braille instruction should not be mandatory for those who do not require it.

Testifying against the bill were Laura Jones, Lighthouse For The Blind-St. Louis; Kevin Hollinger, Hollinger Consulting LLC; Jennifer Coy, Lighthouse For The Blind-St. Louis; Maria Stunkel, American Academy of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus; Anne Silea, Delta Gamma Center; Phillip Karl Wood; Missouri Optometric Association; and the Special School District of St. Louis County.