

HCS HB 2150 -- BRITE ACT

SPONSOR: Shields

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 15 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2150.

This bill establishes the "Blind Students' Rights to Independence, Training, and Education Act" or the "BRITE Act".

The bill provides definitions for "accessible assistive technology device", "adequate instruction", and "nonvisual access and skills" among other definitions.

The bill requires blind and visually impaired students to have an Individualized Education Plan, (IEP) or Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that shall specify results obtained from evaluations on reading and writing skills, and should include the need for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille. All instruction in Braille reading and writing shall be sufficient to allow a student to effectively and efficiently communicate at an appropriate age level.

The bill includes additional guidance for the instruction of Braille and the use of nonvisual accessible assistive technology. The bill provides direction to school districts regarding accessible assistive technology and requires a school district to provide duplicative accessible assistive technology to be used in a blind student's home without requiring payment or family assumption of liability for loss or damage.

The bill requires districts to perform an orientation and mobility evaluation to be conducted by certified individuals and provides guidance on the instruction for orientation and mobility, and districts may not limit a student's instruction in the home, school, and community and provide transportation in the preferred mode of the instructor.

The bill requires educators hired to teach Braille, accessible assistive technology, and orientation and mobility, to hold a valid certificate as outlined in the bill. The bill requires school districts to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) even during declared emergencies, to bear the cost of any required eye report, and to develop nonvisual accessibility policies to reduce or eliminate common barriers for

blind individuals

This bill is similar to HB 1381 (2021).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this language clarifies definitions and terms used by those who are visually impaired. This bill mirrors language found at the federal level and will facilitate equal educational opportunities for the visually impaired community. The bill also provides clarity to the goals for instruction for children with visual impairments and expands the role of instructors to ensure that children are provided additional support. Additional testimony was provided by individuals that would be directly impacted by this bill and specific examples of the potential impact of providing additional support for visually impaired students was expressed.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Shields; Anne Silea, Delta Gamma Center; Carla Christine Keirns; Dr. Jay S Epstein; Kevin Hollinger, Hollinger Consulting, LLC; Lucinda Hall; Maurine Sachs; Russell Dorn; Samuel Richard Cummins; Stephanie Snow Gebel; Arnie C. Ac Dienoff; David Baker; Staci L England; Missouri NEA; Kathy Hurley; Rodger Crome; and Gary Wunder.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.