

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 59

By Gresham

A RESOLUTION to recommend that all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students become better informed concerning the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury.

WHEREAS, overloaded school backpacks are causing an increasing problem of back pain and spinal strain for students across the nation; and

WHEREAS, because spinal ligaments and muscles are not fully developed until after age sixteen, overweight backpacks are a source of repeated low-level stress that may result in chronic neck, shoulder, or back pain in children; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 7,000 emergency room visits each year are due to backpack-related injuries. In 2010 alone, physicians' offices, clinics, and hospital emergency rooms treated nearly 28,000 strains, sprains, dislocations, and fractures from backpacks; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown heavy loads carried on the back have the potential to damage the soft tissues of the shoulder, causing microstructural damage to the nerves and damage to internal organs; and

WHEREAS, studies have also shown an increase in curvatures of the spine and compressed intervertebral height when backpacks exceed ten percent of a child's body weight; and

WHEREAS, the Global Burden of Disease Study of 2010 identified back pain as the number one cause of disability worldwide and musculoskeletal disorders as the second cause; and

WHEREAS, children's textbooks are much heavier now than in the past, and in addition to textbooks, students often carry computers, cell phones, water bottles, running shoes, band instruments, and other equipment; and

WHEREAS, more than ninety percent of students carry backpacks, which in studies have been found to weigh as much as twenty-five percent of the child's body weight; and

WHEREAS, backpacks are often not worn correctly—often slung over one shoulder or allowed to hang significantly below the waistline, increasing the weight on the shoulders and making the child lean forward when walking or stoop forward when standing to compensate for the weight; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we strongly recommend that all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students become better informed concerning the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Doctors of Chiropractic be permitted to conduct mandatory interval scoliosis examinations on children.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that schools should work with their PTA/PTO to assess the extent to which students use overweight backpacks and to promote innovative homework strategies, lessening the need to carry all school materials and books back and forth each day.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that schools should consider the following points when developing their backpack education talking points:

- Backpacks should weigh no more than a maximum of ten percent of a child's body weight.
- Encourage ergonomic backpacks with individualized compartments to efficiently hold books and equipment.
- Encourage children to wear both shoulder straps and not sling the backpack over one shoulder.

- Encourage wide, padded adjustable straps to fit a child's body.
- Encourage the heaviest books be left at school and handouts or workbooks be used for homework assignments.
- Schools should consider utilizing more e-textbooks as federal and State funding becomes available.
- Schools should consider integrated education about backpacks by using a hanging scale in the classroom, allowing students to weigh their backpacks and enter the results into a graph that would track the weights, and then look at the data to determine what can be done to lighten loads.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.