



## **Bill Aims To Reduce School-Based Arrests Students being arrested for non-violent offenses.**

By Diane Orson - WNPR  
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A bill aimed at reducing the numbers of Connecticut students arrested at school passed a legislative committee this week. Supporters of the measure say too many kids are being arrested for low-level, non-violent offenses.

Connecticut Judicial Branch data show that nearly 20% of the cases that ended up in juvenile court during the first six months of the current academic year began when kids were arrested at school.

"41% of those were for breach of peace or disorderly conduct."

That's Hannah Benton, staff attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy.

"Those two charges encompass a range of behaviors but many of those behaviors could be addressed within the regular school disciplinary system."

Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, says the most common infraction is fighting.

"Somebody throws a punch. Nobody really gets hurt. But both kids get arrested. And so this is not a case where we're saying if somebody brings a gun to school there shouldn't be an arrest. There are definitely times when arresting a kid is appropriate. But there are a lot of times when arresting a kid isn't appropriate, and that's what we've gotten into a habit of."

Bill 5432 tackles the problem in 2 ways. First it requires written agreements between schools and police departments that detail the role of police officers stationed in schools. Second, it provides easier access to data on the number of school-based arrests.

Jeffrey Vanderploeg of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut helps schools identify students with underlying mental health needs and works to connect them with services, before there's an arrest.

"When they don't have those needs met, it can contribute to an ongoing cycle of acting out behavior that continually results in arrests. And then the other reality is that once students are involved in the juvenile justice system, it's difficult to get out."

Advocates stress that the bill does not dictate the kind of agreement there must be between schools and police, but sets up a framework to reduce the over-emphasis on school-based arrests.