

Union: Stigma Removed

Revised School Discipline Data Bill Clears Council

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By DAVID SIMS |

The City Council Dec. 20 unanimously passed the Student Safety Act, which increases transparency regarding student discipline, after more than two years of wrangling on the bill, with Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd saying some of his concerns about School Safety Agents being unfairly targeted had been alleviated in the final version of the measure.

Mr. Floyd has argued against the bill's passage since its introduction in 2008, saying School Safety Agents, whom his union represents, were being unfairly targeted by groups like the New York Civil Liberties Union.

'Something We Can Live With'

The Act has changed since then, and Mr. Floyd said that while "we're not endorsing the bill, we're happier with it. This is something we can live with."

The Act requires that the Department of Education and Police Department submit reports to the City Council on school safety and student discipline, with detailed information on matters like suspensions and arrests and summonses issued by School Safety staff. The reports will be broken down by race, ethnicity, gender, age and whether the student has special education or English Language learner status.

Mr. Floyd said earlier iterations of the Act would have posted notices in schools with information on how to report abuse by School Safety Agents, but that provision had been removed.

"That was our real bone of contention," he said in a phone interview. "That was singling out School Safety Agents; they were the only ones who were going to have posters written about them."

'We Don't Abuse Children'

He added that he hoped the new reports would prove that the NYCLU's allegations of widespread abuse in city schools were overblown. "We believe this legislation will go a long way to dispelling the notion that School Safety Agents abuse children," he said. "We will be able to have the statistics published, so parents can find out exactly what is going on in the schools."

NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman has said that the Police Department receives 1,200 complaints a year about police misconduct in schools. There are 5,200 uniformed officers in the NYPD's School Safety Division.

She praised the bill's passage in a statement, saying, "This is a victory for all of New York City's schoolchildren and the core democratic principle of open government," calling the law "an important step toward establishing safety and discipline policies that treat all children fairly, with respect and dignity."

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn said in a statement, "Students trust that when they are in the care and supervision of their school, they will be safe. That trust must never be broken. The Student Safety Act will help make sure the city provides a safe and secure learning environment for our children by promoting transparency."

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