

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 1856

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Education, February 27, 2002

**Title:** An act relating to excused absences from school for search and rescue activities.

**Brief Description:** Excusing student absences for state-recognized search and rescue activities.

**Sponsors:** By Representatives Morell, O'Brien, Talcott, Miloscia, Quall, Carrell, Rockefeller, Bush, Cox, Pflug, Pearson and Woods.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Education: 3/15/01; 2/21/02, 2/27/02 [DPA].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Carlson, Finkbeiner, Hochstatter, Johnson, Kastama, Kohl-Welles, Prentice, Rasmussen and Regala.

**Staff:** Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

**Background:** Currently, children aged 8-17 are required to attend a public school unless exempt from this requirement under a specified provision of law. Some exceptions to this general rule include if the child: (1) is attending a private school; (2) is receiving home-based instruction; (3) has been excused by the school because the child is physically or mentally unable to attend school; or (4) has been temporarily excused by the school at the request of his or her parents for an agreed upon purpose. However, the school may not excuse a student if the absence is deemed to cause a serious adverse effect upon the student's educational progress.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** The Legislature strongly encourages schools to permit excused absences for up to five days per year to students who participate in search and rescue activities. Both the student's parent and the principal of the student's school must approve the absence. Finally, the excused absence may not be approved if it causes a serious adverse effect upon the student's educational progress.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The bill is amended to clarify (1) that search and rescue activities performed by students are absences worthy of excuse from school and (2) that the Legislature strongly encourages schools to permit excused absences for students who participate in search and rescue activities. Additionally, the bill maintains a current-law provision prohibiting the excused absence if it causes a serious adverse effect upon the student's educational progress.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** Some interpretation problems exist regarding current law addressing excused absences from school and its applicability to students who participate in search and rescue activities. Specifically, due to the unpredictability of the timing of search and rescue activities, students participating in the activities may not have obtained an excused absence prior to the activity. Additionally, school district policies regarding this issue vary throughout the state. Students conducting search and rescue activities provide valuable services to their communities and gain lasting life experiences as well. This bill would clarify the law to specifically allow for excused absences from school for students who participate in such activities.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** PRO: Representative Morell, prime sponsor; Grant L. Smith, Explorer Search and Rescue; Ron Bauer, Pierce County Search and Rescue.