The Connecticut General Assembly

State Legislators, Advocates Push for Greater Awareness of Law Preventing Infant Abandonment
Proposed bill would require education in high schools

State Rep. Jeff Currey (D-East Hartford/Manchester, South Windsor), **Education Committee House chair Rep. Andy Fleischmann** (D-West Hartford), and members of the legislature's Safe Havens Working Group held a press conference Wednesday recognizing the third annual Safe Havens Awareness Day and urging greater public awareness of Connecticut's Safe Haven law.

The Safe Haven Act prevents infant abandonment and neonaticide by allowing anyone to drop off a newborn baby (within the first 30 days of life) at any hospital emergency room in Connecticut. Since its passage in 2000, the law has saved 33 infants from abandonment and near certain death.

A bill passed out of the Education Committee this session, HB 5446, contains language proposed by **Rep. Currey** that would require education about the law in public high school health curriculum. The proposal, nicknamed "10 Minutes in 10th Grade," came out of recommendations produced by the working group.

"The Safe Haven Act is quite literally a life-saver, but it only works when people know about it. Including the law in high school health curriculum could prevent infant abandonments like the one we saw in East Hartford in 2014," **Rep. Currey** said. "Young parents are the most vulnerable to making a rash decision, so it is critical teenagers know this option exists. Ten minutes of education in health class is not a lot to ask when we're talking about preventing infant deaths."

"Connecticut's safe haven law saves lives – but only if people know about it," said **Rep. Fleischmann** (D-West Hartford), House chair of the Education Committee.

"Including education about our safe haven law in health classes reflects common sense. It will help ensure that the teenagers most likely to need the law know about it and how it works. This will help ensure that young women with unwanted pregnancies know that leaving their newborn

at an Emergency Room is a safe, legal option for them. This concept has already won the unanimous support of the Education Committee – and I'm optimistic we can get it through both chambers this year," **Fleischmann** said.

"Connecticut passed a great law in 2000 and then didn't create a way to tell kids about it. The lesson learned from the sad statistics showing baby abandonments and neonaticides in our state proves that we need to have a way to teach future generations that there is this great law that could protect a newborn and save the mother from prosecution," said former state Rep. Pam Sawyer, a founding member and coordinator of the Safe Haven Working Group. "Teaching about the law for just 10 minutes in 10th grade is a way to share the Safe Havens Law with the age group who might know someone who needs it, in perpetuity."

There is no fiscal note attached to the proposal, and despite the "10th grade" slogan, high schools could place the curriculum in the grade and class they deem appropriate.

"The mothers of more than 30 children have taken advantage of the law since its enactment in 2000," said Department of Children and Families Commissioner Joette Katz. "So the law has been a success, and anything we can do to ensure that a new generation is aware of it is a smart idea."

"For newborns and their mothers in the state, our Safe Havens law is the intersection between life, hope and opportunity," said Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors.

Under the law, a person who drops off an infant will be given a bracelet matching one put on the infant by hospital staff. The police will not be called and no one will be arrested, assuming the infant has not been abused. If the parents of the child change their minds within 30 days, they may petition to get the baby back. Otherwise, the Department of Children and Families will initiate an accelerated adoption process.

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