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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2017

SENATE RESOLUTION

STRONGLY URGING ALL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND STUDENTS BE EDUCATED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL HEALTH IMPACT OF HEAVY BACKPACKS AND TAKE PROACTIVE MEASURES TO AVOID INJURY

Introduced By: Senators Gallo, Conley, and Ciccone

Date Introduced: May 11, 2017

Referred To: Senate Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 WHEREAS, Children's textbooks are much heavier now than many years ago, and in
18 addition to textbooks, students often carry computers, cell phones, water bottles, running shoes,
19 band instruments, and other equipment considered essential to have readily available; and

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

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

7 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
8 hereby strongly urges that all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students be educated
9 about the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury;
10 and be it further

11 RESOLVED, That this Senate hereby recommends that Doctors of Chiropractic be
12 permitted to conduct mandatory interval scoliosis examinations on children; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That this Senate hereby recommends that schools work with their
14 PTA/PTO to assess the extent to which students use overweight backpacks and to promote
15 innovative homework strategies, lessening the need to take all school materials and books back
16 and forth each day. In addition, schools should consider the following points when developing
17 their backpack education talking points:

18 • Backpacks should weigh no more than a maximum of ten percent of a child's body
19 weight;

20 • Encourage ergonomic backpacks with individualized compartments to efficiently
21 hold books and equipment;

22 • Encourage children to wear both shoulder straps and not sling the backpack over one
23 shoulder;

24 • Encourage wide, padded adjustable straps to fit a child's body;

25 • Encourage the heaviest books be left at school and handouts or workbooks be used
26 for homework assignments;

27 • Schools should consider moving toward e-textbooks as federal and state funding
28 becomes available; and

29 • Schools should consider integrated education about backpacks by using a hanging
30 scale in the classroom, allowing students to weigh their backpack and enter the results into a
31 graph that would track the weights, and then look at the data to determine what can be done to
32 lighten loads; and be it further

33 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
34 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Commissioner of Elementary and

- 1 Secondary Education, the President of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees,
- 2 President of the Rhode Island PTA, President of the Rhode Island Association of Administrators,
- 3 the President of the National Education Association Rhode Island, and the President of Rhode
- 4 Island Chapter of the Federation of Teachers and Healthcare Professionals.

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