

Date of Hearing: May 13, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
ACR 60 (Santiago) – As Introduced April 28, 2015

SUBJECT: Education: students with disabilities.

SUMMARY: Resolves that the Legislature affirms that state policies and procedures should utilize People First Language to the greatest extent possible when referring to students with disabilities. Specifically, **this resolution:**

- 1) Makes findings and declarations relative to the importance of using “People First Language,” which places the person ahead of his or her disability
- 2) Makes findings and declarations regarding the impact that language has on beliefs and attitudes about students with disabilities
- 3) Resolves that the Legislature affirms that state policies and procedures should utilize People First Language to the greatest extent possible, especially those utilized by state and local educational agencies

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes, through federal and state law, a system of special education, implemented through the California Master Plan for Special Education.
- 2) Requires, through federal and state law, that all students who are eligible for special education must be provided with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed non-fiscal by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the resolution. The author’s office states, “The language used to refer to students with disabilities has a profound impact in shaping beliefs and attitudes about these students, driving policies and laws, influencing our feelings and decisions, and affecting students’ daily lives. Old, inaccurate, and inappropriate descriptors about students with disabilities perpetuate negative stereotypes and attitudinal barriers. When we identify or describe students with disabilities primarily in terms of their disability or medical diagnosis, we devalue and stigmatize them. Using thoughtful terminology can foster positive attitudes about students with disabilities.

One of the major improvements in communicating verbally or in writing with or about students with disabilities is People First Language, which places the person ahead of his or her disability. People First Language is an objective form of communication that eliminates generalizations and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability.”

People First Language. People First Language refers to a means of identifying people first as a person and then by their condition. An example: “a person with disability” vs. “a disabled

person.” According to the author, this language reduces generalizations and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability.

A number of public agencies use and promote People First Language. The California Mental Health Services Authority’s Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Initiative endorses People First language as a means of reducing institutional stigma for people with mental health challenges. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) promotes the use of People First Language, and it is endorsed in various ways by California school districts and other states. In the 1980’s a similar movement occurred related to HIV and AIDS, in which advocates worked to change terms such as “AIDS victims” and “AIDS patients” to “people with AIDS.”

Prior legislation. Several bills in recent years have updated language used in the areas of mental health and developmental disabilities. These bills have used People First constructions to describe people in the revised statutes. For example, AB 1847 (Chesbro, Chapter 144, Statutes of 2014) replaced references to “mentally disordered persons” and other such terms throughout 14 California codes with references to “persons with a mental health disorder.” Similarly, AB 2370 (Mansoor, Chapter 448, Statutes of 2012) and SB 1381 (Pavley, Chapter 457, Statutes of 2012) removed references to “mentally retarded persons” and replaced them with “persons with an intellectual disability.”

Technical amendments. *Staff recommends* the following amendments, consistent with the author’s intent:

- Page 1, line 3, delete "About 686,000" and insert "More than 700,000"
- Page 1, lines 4: delete “about” and insert “more than”
- Page 16, after “Whereas” insert “For example,”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

SELPA Administrators of California (sponsor)
Association of Regional Center Agencies
UDW/AFSCME Local 3930

Opposition

None on file

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