ASSEMBLY, No. 416

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

214th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2010 SESSION

Sponsored by:
Assemblyman SCOTT T. RUMANA
District 40 (Bergen, Essex and Passaic)
Assemblyman PATRICK J. DIEGNAN, JR.
District 18 (Middlesex)

SYNOPSIS

"Tabitha's Law"; requires parent or guardian to notify school administrators if pupil will be absent; requires school to notify parent in event of unexcused pupil absence.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 10/15/2010)

AN ACT concerning communication between parents and school administrators on pupil absences and supplementing chapter 36 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This act shall be known and may be cited as "Tabitha's Law."

2. The Legislature finds and declares that when a child is abducted, the first few hours are absolutely critical in the recovery process; that the unexplained absence of a pupil from school can be a significant early warning sign of abduction; that although stranger abductions are rare, an efficient system of communication between school administrators and parents regarding a student's unexplained absence must be incorporated by our public school districts into their attendance systems; and that the benefits of this requirement will be realized even if only one child is saved as a result.

3. a. Whenever a pupil enrolled in a public school district will be absent from school, the pupil's parent or guardian shall notify the principal or the principal's designee.

b. If a pupil is determined to be absent without valid excuse from a public school, and if the reason for the student's absence is unknown to school personnel, the principal or the principal's designee shall immediately attempt to contact the pupil's parent or guardian to notify the parent or guardian of the absence and to determine the reason for the absence.

4. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

On the morning of April 29, 2003, 13-year-old Nashville, Tennessee student, Tabitha Tudor, did not show up for school. Although school administrators had received no notification from Tabitha's parents that she would be absent that day, the school failed to alert the Tudors of their daughter's unexplained absence. As a result, her parents did not learn that Tabitha was missing until after her father arrived home at 4:45 p.m. Due to the delay, law enforcement officials and Tabitha's parents lost an entire day before their search could begin. Tabitha is still missing.

This bill requires parents to notify school administrators whenever their child will be absent from school, and requires administrators to contact parents whenever a pupil is absent without the parent's having provided prior notice. The first few hours of a

child abduction are the most vital to the recovery process. Tabitha's Law is intended to help provide an early warning trigger during that critical time.