

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 4789

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 18, 2021

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 4789 (1R).

This bill establishes the Safe and Equitable Remote Learning Pilot Program in the Department of Education to support the remote learning safe havens by certain eligible districts, including the Camden City School District, the Newark City School District, the Passaic City School District, the Paterson City School District, and the Trenton City School District.

The bill provides that when an eligible district implements a program of virtual or remote instruction or a program of hybrid instruction approved by the Commissioner of Education, the district may, with the approval of the executive county superintendent of schools, establish one or more remote learning safe havens. Each remote learning safe haven would be used for the delivery of remote instruction to enrolled students in accordance with applicable social distancing and other health and safety guidelines. Under the bill, the district would be required to provide broadband Internet service to the facility. The bill requires this service to be sufficient for every enrolled student who is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the State school lunch program to participate in remote instructional sessions at the facility.

In addition to any other requirements established by the Commissioner of Education, each remote learning safe haven would be required to be: (1) located within a building owned by the federal government, the State, a political subdivision of the State, or a nonprofit organization; (2) staffed by appropriately licensed school personnel who have undergone a criminal history record check pursuant and are approved by the board of education, during all hours of operation; and (3) in compliance with the applicable standards for temporary educational facilities required pursuant to the State Board of Education regulations. The regulatory standards for temporary educational facilities are currently established at N.J.A.C.6A:26-8.1.

If an eligible district establishes a remote learning safe haven, the department would be required to provide the district with such funding as is necessary to defray the costs of establishing and staffing the facility, as well as providing the facility with broadband Internet

service. To the maximum extent possible, an eligible district would provide the remote learning safe haven such staff, resources, equipment and materials as may be necessary to establish and operate the remote learning safe haven and to limit the use of staff, resources, equipment, and materials of the remote learning safe haven.

The bill provides that, following the expiration of the public health emergency declared pursuant to Executive Order 103 of 2020 or the rescission of the declaration of the public health emergency declared in that executive order, an eligible district that establishes one or more remote learning safe havens may continue to use, or enter into written agreements or partnerships to continue to use, the remote learning safe havens for before school and after school activities.

Lastly, the bill requires that the Department of Education to collection certain information from eligible districts that establish a remote learning safe haven. Within 30 days of the end of any school year in which an eligible district establishes a remote learning safe haven, the department would submit a report to the Governor, and to the Legislature, containing the information collected from the eligible districts and the department's recommendation on the advisability of continuing and expanding the Safe and Equitable Remote Learning Pilot Program.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This bill is not certified as requiring a fiscal note.