

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 545

By DeBerry J

A RESOLUTION to recommend that all school administrators, teachers, parents and students be educated about the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury.

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, global burden of Disease 2010 showed back pain as the number one cause of disability worldwide and musculoskeletal disorders as the second cause; and

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

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

WHEREAS, wearing of heavy backpacks has been shown to be a burden our kids have to shoulder, leading to higher levels of guilt, contributing to their choosing guilt-inducing snacks over healthy ones and picking boring tasks over fun ones; and

WHEREAS, backpacks are often not worn correctly – often slung over one shoulder or allowed to hang significantly below their waistline, increasing the weight on the shoulders and making the child lean forward when walking or stoop forward when standing to compensate for the weight; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we strongly recommend that all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students be educated about the potential health impact of heavy backpacks and take proactive measures to avoid injury.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Doctors of Chiropractic be permitted to conduct mandatory interval Scoliosis examinations on children.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that schools should work with their PTA/PTO to assess the extent to which students use overweight backpacks and promote innovative homework strategies lessening the need to take all school materials and books back and forth each day.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that schools should consider the following points when developing their backpack education talking points:

- Backpacks should weigh no more than a maximum of ten percent of a child's body weight.
- Encourage ergonomic backpacks with individualized compartments to efficiently hold books and equipment.
- Urge children to wear both shoulder straps and not sling the pack over one shoulder.

- Encourage wide, padded adjustable straps to fit a child's body.
- Encourage the heaviest books be left at school and handouts or workbooks be used for homework assignments.
- Schools need to consider moving toward e-textbooks as federal and state funding becomes available.
- Schools should consider integrated education about backpacks by using a hanging scale in the classroom allowing students to weigh their pack and enter the results into a graph that would track the weights and then look at the data to determine what can be done to lighten loads.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.