

Mushinsky's bill focuses on recovery high schools

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WALLINGFORD — State Rep. Mary Mushinsky is proposing a bill that could bring a recovery high school to the state.

House Bill 6511, "An Act Concerning Recovery High Schools," would require the Department of Education to conduct a survey of substance abuse recovery high school programs in other states and "determine the extent of need for recovery high schools in the state," the bill states.

The bill was referred to the joint Committee on Education on Jan. 26.

"I put it in at the request of the Coalition for a Better Wallingford," Mushinsky, a Democrat representing Wallingford, said. "... I want to put the idea out there. We have alternative high schools for kids having trouble in the traditional high school, but we don't have anything specifically dedicated for recovery — that's a whole separate model from an alternative high school."

The Coalition for a Better Wallingford formed in 2013 and consists of community leaders and parents working to prevent drug overdose deaths in town.

A recovery high school is "specifically designed for students recovering from a substance use disorder," according to the National Center for Biotechnology Information. There are 39 recovery high schools throughout the country, according to data by the Association of Recovery Schools. In the region, there are five schools in Massachusetts.

The Association of Recovery Schools' data also shows there are six more planned recovery schools in the country.

Mushinsky said she was unsure the likelihood of the bill being approved because of the tight budget, but she remained optimistic that alternatives can be looked at.

"The budget is tight this year and I had suggested to them that they look at it as a charter school," she said. "I'm not sure where we're going with this financially, but I want to get the idea out there and see if we can tap into existing educational funding and redirect it towards a school model, like the Massachusetts schools that have a proven track record."

Ken Welch, the founder of the coalition, said he was glad Mushinsky introduced the bill.

"I'm glad to know the discussion is going to get started at the state level," he said. "Even in these hard economic times, there is a real need and we don't have to rewrite anything with the pilot program because there are similar programs around the country."