

## Item 25-0298: Resolution #3-R-25 Truancy Ordinance

### Safety and Licensing Committee

Wed, Mar 26, 2025 5:30PM

#### **Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 00:58**

Okay, so the first action item is 25-0298. It is resolution 3-R-25 which is the truancy ordinance, which was submitted at the last Common Council meeting by Alder Siebers. I'm going to give Alder Siebers an opportunity to speak, because that's what we typically do when someone submits a resolution and it comes to committee. The person that submitted it gets to speak first.

#### **Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 01:21**

I do want to say a couple things though. One, thank you all for coming. I love to see things that people get passionate about and come to meetings. We love when people attend our meetings. I do—I will give everyone an opportunity to speak that wants to speak. So, thank you for signing up ahead of time. If you didn't sign up and you want to speak, we'll give you an opportunity at the end.

#### **Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 01:43**

Motion to approve for sake of discussion.

#### **Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 01:48**

Okay, can you repeat your motion?

#### **Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 01:50**

Motion to approve for the sake of discussion.

#### **Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 01:52**

We have a motion to approve for the sake of discussion, to essentially get it on the table. Is there a second? I'm not hearing a second. I was—so that that—we'll hold on a motion for right now. I wanted to finish my comments quick here. The intent for me of this would be to definitely take the public input. I'm hoping that we can hold this item at committee until a future Safety and Licensing Committee meeting for the fact of doing a little—letting the parties do a little bit more evaluation and have some more discussion amongst the stakeholders. So, at this point, I'm going to turn it over to Alder Siebers who submitted the resolution, and he can make his comments.

#### **Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 02:40**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the time for these opening remarks. At our last Council meeting, School Superintendent Greg Hartjes and social worker Stephanie Marta gave her presentation on a serious problem, school truancy and specific chronic absenteeism. Superintendent Hartjes asked for our help in addressing this problem. He stated that he was not seeking to revive the truancy court. He also stated that mistakes were made and that the administration has learned from those mistakes. At the end of our council meeting, I submitted the resolution that's before us tonight.

#### **Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 03:21**

First, I want to state that, at the appropriate time, I will ask that this resolution be held until the first meeting in May of this committee. May I state the reasons for asking that this be held? First of all, this resolution is what I will refer to as a shell. It merely indicates that the city agrees to become partners with the school district in

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addressing this problem. It purposely does not provide a great deal of substance. Details need to be added to this before you can cast a vote on this, unless you do not want to hear any details and do not want to see any city involvement. I hope that is not any member's stand on this today.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 04:05**

Secondly, there is a meeting scheduled by the mayor for April 15 with our attorney's office, our police department, the school district, the county, and judiciary to discuss a truancy ordinance, what it is and how it will be enforced. It is here I see substance being added to this resolution.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 04:26**

Finally, it is extremely important that we have public input in providing substance. Again, I would hope that those here would at least want to see what a truancy ordinance looks like before slamming the door on it, and instead of outright opposing it at this time, that those speaking would be more inclined to add their substance to it. I truly believe that with the helpful suggestions tonight by those in attendance and the meeting in April, we will have a clear picture of whether or not the city will be involved in addressing this problem and, if so, to what extent.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 05:04**

Mr. Chairman, on occasion we have had students attend our meetings as learning experience. I would love to see students appear before this committee and share their insight and suggestions, those who are not true, and especially those who do not want for whatever reason and have not attended school on a regular and consistent basis. And it would be helpful to hear from parents of those who have children who have chronic absenteeism problems.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 05:33**

Mr. Chairman and committee members, there is a problem. It is easy to see as not our problem but a school district problem. Many of you may know that for 24 and a half years, I worked with troubled adolescents who were on the verge of being sent to a state institution if they didn't change their ways. These were kids who spent more time trying to figure out how not to go to school than to go to school and succeed. Definitely challenging work. And I'll be honest with you, sometimes I felt like giving up, but what kept me going for 24 and a half years was in seeing each child as I would see my own child. I sincerely hope we all can do the same as we share our opinions and hopefully answer the schools district's call for help. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 06:24**

Okay, thank you, Alder Siebers. Appreciate that.

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 06:27**

Okay, let's go to the public comment.

[Cut]

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 45:03**

All right, we'll close public participation, and we will—if it's okay with the attorney's office, I want to give other alders an opportunity to speak before we take a motion and bring it up, bring it to the committee. Okay. Thank you. Alders present, anyone like to speak or comment? Alder Hartzheim? District 13?

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**Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 45:28**

Thank you, Chair. I concur with the last speaker. I think we should wait and see, because this resolution is very wide open at this point, and I think we're looking for more specifics before we'd be able to say yes or no to a municipal ordinance. Thank you.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 45:41**

Yes, thank you. I do agree with that. Alder Hayden, were you next? Alder Meltzer? District Six. Go ahead.

**Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 45:49**

Thank you, Chair. I think this resolution—in fact, I know this resolution comes from a good place, because Alder Siebers is a very responsible alder, and I appreciate all the work that he does. But I think, honestly, it's going to take longer than a month for something to be put together for this shell resolution to be ready for prime time. So, I would ask the committee to move forward with this, with a recommendation to deny. I would say that, effectively, what this has done, it's taken the genie out of the bottle, and as we've seen from many speakers today, it's going to be hard put that genie back in the bottle, and people's minds are kind of running wild with all the possibilities that this resolution—this ordinance, what it could look like. I don't think it's fair for us to put this on staff with little direction about around what to move forward with, and I believe that doing this quickly is something that puts our most vulnerable students at risk.

**Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 46:45**

And at the same time, I also feel like there's a bigger focus on numbers than the reasons why kids are in truant. A lot of my frustration comes from in September, when I met with the Superintendent and he put together a very good argument. And as I always tell people, numbers win arguments, and he had a very persuasive argument about what we need to do about truancy. Myself and Alder Croatt sat down with Chief Olson, Attorney Behrens, and various other members of staff, and they came up with a list of things that needed to happen for there to be an effective truancy ordinance. We responded that we were looking for things like judges invested in the process, social workers who can help with all the issues that truly lead to habitual truancy, lawyers who are truly invested in kids succeeding and going to school and being productive members of society, and a framework, an outline, a plan to how to address the issues that truly make kids truant, not because they don't want to go to school. And any—I think that gets back to what we were truly looking for was any solution needs to be focused on the reasons why kids are truant, rather than a one size fits all solution.

**Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 48:00**

So, as I said, I would ask the committee to move forward with a recommendation to deny I think moving this board would be a wasteful use of the city's resources, especially to pick up something this abstract. And I believe if the superintendent was truly more serious about this not being a punitive action, not being punitive to students, I think he would have been more responsive to the issues that we raised and the potential of creating an infrastructure for a successful ordinance to be handled by the city.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 48:33**

Thank you, Alder Hayden. All right. Alder Meltzer, was your hand up? Okay, you're going to have 13.

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 48:43**

Thank you. I—certainly if the committee would vote this down, I would support that, but if the community does want to have more discussion about it, I also would be comfortable with it being held. I think that there are a number of things that are very important for us to keep in mind. The schools do not have the funding that they need to be fully staffed with counselors. The schools are looking for a solution to a problem, and they are asking us for help. I do not think that an ordinance involving the Appleton Police Department is the solution that will

help. I think that there is a lot of harm that can result from that. But is there some kind of outside of the box thinking? Is there a partnership where there's a way to do something about that resource gap and to increase the number of counselors in the schools? You know, obviously this is something that should come from the AASD budget. But if there is any way for the partnership with a partnership with the city to focus on that kind of support rather than fines and citations, I think that that would be a productive conversation for our community to have. Thank you.

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 50:01**

Thank you. Alder Wolff? All right.

**Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 50:07**

Thank you, Chair. If the committee does decide to hold this item past April 15, something that should be taken in note is that, one, I think the superintendent would actually probably appreciate that because they're not here tonight. And, two, that it would probably be beneficial to do, like, the second meeting of the new council for Safety and Licensing instead of having the new safety and licensing committee take that up on their first meeting. I think that might be a beneficial thing to think about as well. I know none of us have really brought that up yet, but.

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 50:49**

Thank you. Yes, there will probably be—the chance of it being a different committee makeup after the election is likely. Hoping to remain chair, but that's no guarantee. So yes, I understand what you're saying. So, thank you. Okay, that all Alder—oh, Alder van Zeeland, would you like to speak? All right. Hang on, what do I need to do?

**Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 51:16**

Thank you Chair. Can you—no?

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 51:18**

Yes, we can hear you. Yep.

**Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 51:20**

Okay, thank you. I was just wondering if—I didn't see anything attached to the agenda. Was there any other information provided by AASD or was our legal department able to put together any information? Or are we waiting until after the meeting in April?

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 51:38**

Thank you. Good question. For clarification, the only thing in the packet for the agenda tonight was the actual resolution. And of course, we all did get the presentation at Council, which obviously ties to this, but that is the extent of the documentation that is available for the committee.

**Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 51:56**

Okay. And no one from AASD was present today?

**Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:00**

No. There is no representative from AASD here. I believe Superintendent Hartjes is out of town.

**Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 52:07**

Okay. Thank you.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:08**

Yep, thank you. Okay, so I think we'll get a motion here from the committee, but it would be my hope that we hold this until a future Safety and Licensing Committee meeting. If someone wants to pick a date or reference a point in time, that would be great. I think that will allow two things. It will allow this stakeholders meeting as I'm calling it to take place, and it will also hopefully bring back to this committee, maybe some more information to consider as we either vote for this or against it or do something else with it. So, Alder Fenton?

**[Off microphone someone makes a motion to hold.]**

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 52:48**

Thank you, Chair.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:49**

Okay, well, wait we just had a motion to hold.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 52:52**

Oh.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:52**

Is there a second?

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 52:53**

He was out of turn.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:54**

Well, yes, but it was a motion.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:01**

I'm—

**[The attorney says something off microphone.]**

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:03**

Okay. Before the committee discusses, I'd like to have a motion. So, let's get a motion. Sorry.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 53:09**

It's okay.

**[Someone mentions the microphone is turned off.]**

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:10**

Oh, well, I turn it off. I'm sorry. I didn't know that.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 53:13**

Motion to hold till the first scheduled meeting in May.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:16**

Okay,

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 53:17**

That would be the 14th.

**Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:19**

Okay, so we have a motion and a second to hold until the 14th. Alder Fenton, go ahead. I'm sorry. I just wanted to make sure we had a motion on the table.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 53:25**

Thank you, chair, and apologies to my colleague down the row. That was going to be exactly my motion. I appreciate Alder Siebers' remarks, because the resolution that came to us last week was not what I would have expected from Alder Siebers over his long and career as an aldersperson in the city. What I know about him is that he does his homework, and when I saw this resolution that really had no particulars, it honestly shocked me, and so I am much calmer now having heard his remarks. There is a whole lot to consider here, whether we are—I became—I was elected to my position in a special election in September of 2019 for people who remember what was going on in August of 2019. So, I became a member of the Council right after the old truancy ordinance was repealed.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 54:38**

So, I think there are a lot of things to consider here, and I know we're discussing a motion to hold, but a laundry list of things I think we should look at—I did some research, because Superintendent Hartjes in his presentation, pointed out districts in our area and that they all had some sort of truancy ordinance in the city. So, I took a look at some of those, and I took a look at the six largest municipalities in our state to try to get—because most of the districts in our area are a little bit smaller than Appleton, and really the demographics are different in a lot of those districts that are in our area.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 55:20**

A concern—a thing that was a real concern to me, that I would caution us to stay away from—and that being said, I have all the faith in the people who are going to be working on this to come to a solution. Most of these ordinances, local ordinances, are really copied from the state statute, which is incredibly punitive, calls for fines up, you know, depending on the occurrences, up to \$500, license suspensions that in some cases are longer than a first OWI offense for truancy, monitoring of—and remember, the majority of high school students are children. They're, you know, they're not all 18 when they're in high school. So, I think that that we really want to consider how will this be enforced? What's the mechanism?

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 56:21**

Just as the schools are short on resources, our police department is. You know, we talk about noise ordinances, and a lot of times we have to say, well, the police department has to prioritize what they're doing. So, we—we're in a similar position with the schools and counseling. We don't necessarily have police resources to issue these tickets outside of the SROs. I'd want to see what sort of what sort of metrics we're going to. Anything that we're going to do, we were asked to do something for two school years. How will we know if it's successful? Who's going to do these measurements? Is it the school? Is it the city? Is it the police department? I just think all of these things need to be considered. So, I'm willing to hold this for—'til mid-May, like we talked about, but I really want to get some of these answers before I'm willing to take this any further than that. Thank you.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 57:31**

Thank you. Alder Fenton. Yeah, lots of, lots of questions without answers at this point. So that's another reason, I think, not to take action other than a hold tonight. Anyone else from committee? All right, we have a motion and a second to hold. Any final comments. Not seeing anyone. Okay, and the hold was until April 15?

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 57:54**

May.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 57:54**

Or, I'm sorry, May 15.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 57:56**

May 14.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 57:57**

May 14, geez, I was way off.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 58:00**

We'll have a council meeting on the seventh—

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 58:02**

Because the stakeholders' meeting is on the 15th. Yeah, I had it mixed up with the stakeholders meeting on the 15. So, a motion a second to hold until May 14. All those in favor signify by saying Aye. All opposed? Any abstentions? Five zero.

**Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 58:18**

Okay, so this has been held at committee. So here. It won't—you won't see it at Council anytime soon. The next meeting would be on—that will take this up would be on the 14th of May. So, thank you all for coming. Thanks for your comments. Thanks for sharing your stories. We appreciate it. I'm glad everyone had an opportunity to participate tonight.