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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sHB 6952**

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS.***

#### **SUMMARY**

Starting in 2026, this bill prohibits any recreational or educational children's program that does not hold a youth camp license from using the term "camp" in the program's name in any advertisements, unless the advertisement states that the program is unlicensed. A violation of this provision is an unfair or deceptive trade practice.

Starting in 2026, the bill also requires all prospective employees who are at least 18, work at a municipal recreational or educational children's program, and have unsupervised access to a child to undergo a comprehensive background check. Pending completion of this background check, an employee can work provisionally if they are under supervision.

For existing employees, a background check must be done no later than five years after the employee's hiring date, and then redone every five years.

Furthermore, starting in 2026, the bill requires that municipal recreational or educational children's programs have at least one staff person (1) for every 12 children, and (2) who is CPR and first aid trained during the program's daily operation.

The bill also requires that any paid director, assistant director, or staff member of a municipal recreational or educational children's program who is 21 years of age or older be a mandated reporter of child abuse or neglect and complete an educational training program or refresher training program annually. In addition, when a child abuse or neglect report is associated with a municipal recreational or educational

children’s program, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) commissioner must notify the chief executive officer of the municipality where the program is located.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

### **§ 1 — ADVERTISING AS A “YOUTH CAMP”**

Beginning January 1, 2026, the bill prohibits a recreational or educational children’s program that does not hold a license to operate a youth camp issued by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) from using the term “camp” in the name of their program in any associated advertising materials, unless the materials state that they do not hold a license. A violation is an unfair or deceptive trade practice under the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act (CUTPA) (see BACKGROUND).

The bill defines a “recreational or educational children’s program” as a regularly scheduled program or group, of those types, activity that operates only during school vacations or on weekends, and meets at least portions of three or more days per week. The term includes private, municipal, or state programs. These programs must accommodate five or more children who are age 3 to 15 and are participating apart from their parent or legal guardian.

The term specifically includes (1) classroom-based summer instructional programs, (2) public or private school summer educational programs, (3) licensed child care centers, and (4) drop-in programs for children who are at least age six run by a nationally chartered boys’ and girls’ club.

### **§§ 2-6 — MUNICIPAL RECREATIONAL OR EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN’S PROGRAMS**

#### ***Definition***

The bill defines a “municipal recreational or educational children’s program” as a municipally run regularly scheduled program or group activity, of those types, that operates only during school vacations or on weekends, meets at least portions of three days per week, and accommodates five or more children age 3 to 15.

**Background Checks (§ 2)**

Beginning January 1, 2026, the bill requires all prospective employees of municipal recreational or educational children’s programs who are (1) 18 years of age or older, and (2) applying for a position requiring care or unsupervised access to a child to complete a background check. Pending completion of the background check, a prospective employee can work on a provisional basis if they are always supervised by an employee who has completed a background check in the last five years.

Under the bill, existing employees with the same access to children must complete a background check no later than five years after the employee was hired and which must be repeated at least once during every five-year period after that. The bill specifies that the employers may require more frequent checks.

The bill provides two options to meet this background check requirement. Under the first option, the check must include the following:

1. a criminal history records check done either (a) through the existing process for background checks from the State Police (see BACKGROUND) or (b) by searching the Judicial Department’s online criminal record system using the prospective employee’s name and birth year,
2. a state child abuse registry check,
3. a state sexual offender registry check, and
4. a check of the National Sex Offender Registry Public Website.

Alternatively, the check can be done by a third-party national criminal history check provider.

**Staff-to-Children Ratio at Municipal Programs (§ 3)**

Beginning January 1, 2026, the bill requires that municipal recreational or educational children’s programs have at least one staff person for every 12 children during all hours of the program’s daily

operation. They also must have at least one staff person who is CPR and first aid trained during these hours and at off-site activities when children enrolled in the program are present.

Presumably, if a municipal recreational or educational children's program is licensed as a youth camp by OEC, the program would instead follow the staff-to-children ratios in the existing youth camp regulations (see BACKGROUND).

### ***Mandated Reporter Provisions (§§ 4-6)***

The bill requires any paid director, assistant director, or staff member of a municipal recreational or educational children's program who is 21 years of age or older to be a mandated reporter of child abuse or neglect (see BACKGROUND). If a report involves a situation that occurred on the premises of such a program or during an off-site activity conducted by the program, the DCF commissioner must notify the chief executive officer of the municipality where the program is located. This notice cannot include personally identifying information of the child associated with the report.

Furthermore, the bill requires each such paid director, assistant director, and staff member 21 years of age or older to complete DCF's educational training program or refresher training program on the mandated reporter law (see BACKGROUND) by July 1, 2026, and repeated annually thereafter. Starting by August 1, 2026, the director or equivalent employee of each municipal agency that operates a municipal recreational or educational children's program must annually certify whether the training program has been completed by the listed individuals in the proceeding 12-month period.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act***

By law, CUTPA prohibits businesses from engaging in unfair and deceptive acts or practices. It allows the consumer protection commissioner, under specified procedures, to issue regulations defining an unfair trade practice; investigate complaints; issue cease and desist orders; order restitution in cases involving less than \$10,000; impose

civil penalties of up to \$5,000; enter into consent agreements; ask the attorney general to seek injunctive relief; and accept voluntary statements of compliance. It also allows individuals to sue. Courts may issue restraining orders; award actual and punitive damages, costs, and reasonable attorney's fees; and impose civil penalties of up to \$5,000 for willful violations and up to \$25,000 for a restraining order violation.

### ***Staff-to-Children Ratio of Resident Youth Camps***

By law, the OEC commissioner must adopt regulations on camper to staff ratios. Under the regulations, resident youth camps must maintain a camper to staff ratio of 6:1 for children less than age eight and 8:1 for campers aged eight and older. Day camps must maintain a ratio of 9:1 for campers less than age six and 12:1 for children aged six or older. In both cases, these staff must be at least age 16. These ratios must be maintained at all times, including during camp trips and outings (CGS § 19a-428 and Conn. Agencies Regs., § 19a-428-2(n)).

### ***Existing Criminal History Records Check Process***

A state criminal history records check must be requested from the State Police Bureau of Identification. The requesting party must arrange for the fingerprinting of the individual or for conducting any other method of positive identification the bureau requires (CGS § 29-17a).

### ***Mandated Reporters, Abuse or Neglect Reports, and Educational Training Program***

People in specified professions or occupations that have contact with children or whose primary focus is children are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to DCF or a law enforcement agency.

A mandated reporter must file a report when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child (1) has been abused or neglected; (2) is placed in imminent risk of serious harm; or (3) suffered a nonaccidental physical injury or injury that varies from its given history. These reports must be filed as soon as practicable but no later than 12 hours after they have reasonable cause to make the report (and for oral reports, they must follow up with a written report to DCF within 48 hours).

DCF's training program and refresher training program for mandated reporters includes training on accurately and promptly identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and neglect (CGS § 17a-101(c)).

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 14 Nay 3 (03/06/2025)