

Last Chance

OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 6 (File 199, as amended by Senate "A" and "C")*

AN ACT CONCERNING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS AND DISCONNECTED YOUTHS.

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SUMMARY

This bill contains various provisions affecting resources and supports for infants, toddlers, and disconnected youth as described in the section-by-section analysis below.

*Senate Amendment "A" eliminates provisions (1) designating the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), instead of the state department of education (SDE), as the lead agency for administering and distributing Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds; (2) requiring SDE to develop guidance for local and regional boards of education on administering kindergarten preparatory academies; and (3) allowing Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program funds to be used to establish or expand kindergarten preparatory academies. It adds provisions (1) prohibiting OEC from requiring municipal youth camps to have an on-site physician or advanced practice registered nurse (APRN), (2) expanding the required content of the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission's annual report, and (3) generally requiring certain child care and education programs to participate in CACFP. It also (1) modifies the scope and content of OEC's report on its use of the Sparkler application and (2) extends, from July 1, 2025, to May 1, 2026, the effective date for municipal youth camp provisions.

*Senate Amendment "C" requires the Connecticut Preschool Through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (P20WIN) to submit its report on disconnected youth every two years, instead of annually.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025, except for provisions on municipal youth camps, which take effect May 1, 2026.

§ 1 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION FUND ADVISORY COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

Expands the required content of the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission's annual report to include information related to Early Start CT and the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Existing law requires the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission to annually report, starting by January 1, 2026, on the fund's financial health and status, including:

1. the amount deposited in the fund and whether it is sufficient to achieve the fund's purposes,
2. actual or expected disbursements for the applicable fiscal year,
3. the fund's investments' rates of return, and
4. any recommendations for policy changes and statutory changes to further the fund's purposes.

Beginning January 1, 2027, the bill requires the commission, in consultation with OEC, to also include in the report the number of:

1. early care and education programs receiving Early Start CT funds that are eligible to participate in the federal CACFP and those that do so and
2. waivers from participating in CACFP the OEC commissioner issues (see § 2 below).

Under existing law and the bill, the commission must submit its annual report to the Appropriations; Children; Education; and Finance, Revenue and Bonding committees.

§ 2 — CACFP PARTICIPATION

Requires early care and education programs that receive financial assistance under Early Start CT to participate in the Child Adult Care Food Program unless exempted from participating by OEC

By law, SDE administers, in collaboration with OEC, a child nutrition outreach program to increase participation in various federal food programs, and federal reimbursement for them.

Existing law requires the outreach program to encourage early care and education programs to participate in CACFP. But beginning July 1, 2026, the bill requires any early care and education program that receives Early Start CT funds and is eligible to participate in CACFP to do so unless it receives a waiver from the OEC commissioner.

Background — Child Adult Care Food Program

CACFP is a federal meal program aimed at lowering the costs of nutritional meals for vulnerable populations, including low-income children and people with disabilities. Meals are offered through eligible providers, such as child care centers and family child care homes, who are reimbursed by the state.

Background — Early Start CT

PA 24-78 consolidated the School Readiness Preschool Grant Program, state-contracted child care centers for disadvantaged children, and the state supplemental Head Start grants into one program (Early Start CT), starting in 2026. The program (1) provides open access for infants and toddlers and pre-school age children to high quality programs that promote the health and safety of children and prepare them for school, and (2) prevent or minimizes the potential for developmental delay in children before age five.

§ 3 — ANNUAL REPORT ON DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Requires P20WIN to submit its report on disconnected youth biennially, instead of annually and also give it to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and the Two-Generational Advisory Board; requires the legislature to hold a hearing on each biennial report; requires P20WIN, when preparing its 2027 annual report, to incorporate data provided by specified state agencies and sets related requirements

Under current law, the executive board of P20WIN must submit an annual report on disconnected youth (i.e. certain youth ages 14 to 26 who are at-risk students and not enrolled in high school) to the Appropriations, Children, Education, Human Services, Judiciary, Labor and Public Employees, and Public Health committees. The bill additionally requires the board to give the annual report to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and the Two-Generational Advisory Board. It also requires the board to

submit the report every two years, instead of annually.

Under the bill, the legislative committees listed above must hold a hearing on the report between January 1 and February 1 in the year after the report's submission.

Additionally, the bill requires the executive board, when preparing its January 1, 2027, report, to include a plan to incorporate data provided by OEC, the Department of Developmental Services, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, and the Office of Health Strategy (OHS) through an enterprise memorandum of understanding (MOU) (see *Background — Enterprise MOU*).

Under the bill, this data may at least include the following: (1) OEC child-level data on the Care 4 Kids program, Birth-to-Three Program, Early Start CT, Family Bridge Program, early childhood home visiting programs, and early care and education programs, and (2) OHS data from the all-payer claims database.

Background — Enterprise MOU

By law, an “enterprise MOU” is a foundational, multiparty agreement that sets forth details of how data is shared and the respective legal rights and responsibilities of each party to the process, which may also be used for new agencies to sign on to the data-sharing process, without having to re-sign as agencies sign on (or off) the agreement.

§ 4 — CONNECTICUT SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Increases maximum grant amounts awarded under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program

By law, the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program provides grants for capital and operating expenses for local and regional boards of education to establish or expand preschool programs. The bill increases the program's maximum grant amounts as follows:

1. for capital grants, from \$75,000 to \$105,000 per classroom to renovate an existing public school to accommodate or expand a preschool program and

2. for annual operating expenses grants, (a) from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per child served by the grant or (b) from \$75,000 to \$105,000 per preschool classroom for a period of five years, as long as the program continues to meet OEC standards.

Under existing law and the bill, to be eligible for a grant, an applicant board must demonstrate that they have a need to establish or expand a preschool program, submit a plan for spending grant funds, and submit a letter of support from the local or regional school readiness council, if applicable.

§§ 5-7 — MUNICIPAL YOUTH CAMPS

Subjects municipal youth camps to OEC licensure, which they are exempt from under current law; prohibits OEC from requiring municipal youth camps to have an on-call physician or APRN

The bill subjects municipal youth camps (those serving children ages 3 to 16) to state oversight by requiring them to obtain a license from OEC. Currently, municipal day camps are exempt from state licensure.

In doing so, the bill extends to municipal youth camps existing licensure requirements for non-municipal youth camps, including requirements related to immunizations, medication administration, inspections and investigations, criminal background checks, and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. However, regardless of existing statutory requirements, the bill prohibits OEC from requiring municipal youth camps to retain an on-call physician or advanced practice registered nurse. (Existing regulations, authorized by law, require this for non-municipal youth camps (Conn. Agencies Regs., § 19a-428-5).)

As under existing law, municipal day camps must apply to OEC for a license at least 30 days before opening the camp and pay the associated fee (currently \$815 for for-profit camps and \$315 for nonprofit camps). Licenses must be renewed annually.

Under the bill, OEC may take various disciplinary actions against municipal youth camps under existing law, such as license suspension or revocation.

§ 8 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CABINET MEMBERSHIP

Adds the Connecticut Library Consortium's executive director to the membership of the Early Childhood Cabinet

The bill increases the Early Childhood Cabinet's membership, from 31 to 32, by adding the Connecticut Library Consortium's executive director.

By law, the Early Childhood Cabinet (1) advises OEC, (2) develops an annual action plan that assigns state agencies certain tasks specified in the federal Head Start Act, and (3) submits an annual state-wide strategic report that addresses agencies' progress in meeting the action plan's requirements.

§§ 9-11 — BIRTH-TO-THREE AND HELP ME GROW PROGRAMS

Requires OEC to (1) update and expand the content of its one-page developmental milestone document, (2) conduct a quarterly review of children deemed ineligible for Birth-to-Three, and (3) provide certain supports to teen parents through the Help Me Grow program

The bill makes various changes to notice and information collection requirements related to OEC's Help Me Grow and Birth-to-Three programs (see *Background*).

It requires OEC to update, as needed, its one-page developmental document required under existing law. Currently, the document must (1) list key developmental milestones for children from birth to age five and (2) notify parents and guardians concerned that their child has not yet met any developmental milestones that they may access the OEC Child Development Infoline for information on appropriate services.

The bill additionally requires the document to notify parents and guardians that they may also access the Help Me Grow program for information on the following:

1. accessing no-cost developmental screening and evaluation programs for children ages birth to five,
2. connecting to community and in-home programs and services,
3. parenting and healthy child development supports, and

4. early intervention and special education services.

Under the bill, OEC must also do the following:

1. conduct a quarterly review to determine how many children referred to the Birth-to-Three program were deemed ineligible and why;
2. notify parents and guardians of ineligible children that they may receive additional supports and services from the Help Me Grow program;
3. collect information on these ineligible children including (a) the types of supports and services and (b) additional referrals they receive under the Help Me Grow program; and
4. provide, through the Help Me Grow program, trainings and other social, educational, and workforce supports to teen parents in communities with teen birth rates greater than 10% (according to the Department of Public Health's most recent data).

Background — Birth-to-Three

By law, the Birth-to-Three program is designed to strengthen families' capacities to meet the developmental and health-related needs of their infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities. Generally, to be eligible for the program a child must (1) live in Connecticut, (2) be younger than three, and (3) have a developmental delay or a medical condition that most likely will result in a developmental delay.

Background — Help Me Grow Program

By law, the Help Me Grow program identifies children at risk for developmental or behavioral problems and connects them to existing community resources. Program components include, among other things, (1) training child health providers in effective developmental surveillance; (2) creating a resource inventory of community-based programs supporting child development and families; (3) developing a coordinated, statewide referral system that links young children and

families to existing services and support; and (4) collecting data and analyses of children's developmental status and statewide resources.

§ 12 — SPARKLER MOBILE APPLICATION

Requires OEC to develop a report on the Sparkler mobile application's use and submit its report to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2026

The bill requires OEC to develop a report on the use of the "Sparkler" mobile application (see *Background — Sparkler Mobile Application*) by OEC and parents.

Under the bill, the report must examine the following:

1. the total capacity and use of Sparkler total based on the contract and appropriated amounts for OEC to use it;
2. Sparkler's actual usage each year since OEC began using it;
3. the number of Ages and Stages Questionnaires (which evaluate children's social and emotional development), completed through Sparkler and their aggregated scores;
4. the number of children who enrolled in the Birth-to-Three program after completing these questionnaires through Sparkler;
5. the number of families each whose scores on these questionnaires are below 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, and 2.5 standard deviations below average; and
6. the number of families who initially interacted with the 2-1-1 system through Sparkler.

The bill requires OEC to submit its report to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2026.

Background — Sparkler Mobile Application

Sparkler is a mobile application that gives parents and guardians with children ages birth to five social and emotional developmental screenings. The application (1) tracks children's developmental progress, (2) provides information on activities that can promote

development, and (3) provides access to 2-1-1's early childhood providers and care coordinators.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 12 Nay 5 (03/06/2025)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 38 Nay 12 (05/05/2025)