



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 103

February Session, 2026

Substitute House Bill No. 5004

House of Representatives, March 23, 2026

The Committee on Children reported through REP. PARIS of the 145th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Subsection (c) of section 17a-114 of the 2026 supplement to
2 the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
3 thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

4 (c) (1) Notwithstanding the requirements of subsection (b) of this
5 section, the commissioner [may] shall make an emergency placement of
6 a child with a relative or fictive kin caregiver who has not been issued a
7 license or approval, [when] if such emergency placement is in the best
8 interests of the child, provided a satisfactory home visit is conducted
9 and a basic assessment of the family is completed. When the
10 commissioner makes such an emergency placement, the commissioner
11 shall (A) request a criminal justice agency to perform a federal name-
12 based criminal history search of such relative or fictive kin caregiver and
13 each person eighteen years of age or older residing in the home, and (B)
14 check the state child abuse and neglect registry established pursuant to

15 section 17a-101k for the name of such relative or fictive kin caregiver
16 and each person eighteen years of age or older residing in the home. The
17 results of such name-based search shall be provided to the
18 commissioner.

19 (2) Not later than ten calendar days after a name-based search is
20 performed pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the
21 commissioner shall request the State Police Bureau of Identification to
22 perform a state and national criminal history records checks of such
23 relative or fictive kin caregiver and each person eighteen years of age or
24 older residing in the home, in accordance with section 29-17a. Such
25 criminal history records checks shall be deemed as required by this
26 section for the purposes of section 29-17a and the commissioner may
27 request that such criminal history records checks be performed in
28 accordance with subsection (c) of said section. The results of such
29 criminal history records checks shall be provided to the commissioner.
30 If any person refuses to provide fingerprints or other positive
31 identifying information for the purposes of such criminal history
32 records checks when requested, the commissioner shall immediately
33 remove the child from the home.

34 (3) If the commissioner denies an emergency placement with a
35 relative or fictive kin caregiver or removes a child from such home based
36 on the results of a federal name-based criminal history search performed
37 pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the person whose name-
38 based search was the basis for such denial or removal may contest such
39 denial or removal by requesting that state and national criminal history
40 records checks be performed pursuant to subdivision (2) of this
41 subsection. Upon the denial of an emergency placement with a relative
42 or fictive kin caregiver or removal of a child from such relative or fictive
43 kin caregiver's home, the commissioner shall document, in writing, the
44 reason for such denial or removal. If a child is placed in the home of a
45 person who is not a relative or fictive kin caregiver, the commissioner
46 shall confirm, in writing, that such placement, rather than placement
47 with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of such
48 child.

49 (4) Any such relative or fictive kin caregiver who accepts placement
50 of a child shall be subject to licensure by the commissioner, pursuant to
51 regulations adopted by the commissioner in accordance with the
52 provisions of chapter 54, to implement the provisions of this section or
53 approval by a child-placing agency licensed pursuant to section 17a-149.
54 The commissioner may grant a waiver from such regulations, including
55 any standard regarding separate bedrooms or room-sharing
56 arrangements, for a child placed with a relative or fictive kin caregiver,
57 on a case-by-case basis, if such placement is otherwise in the best
58 interests of such child, provided no procedure or standard that is safety-
59 related may be so waived. The commissioner shall document, in writing,
60 the reason for granting any waiver from such regulations.

61 Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 46b-129 of the 2026 supplement to the
62 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
63 thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

64 (b) If it appears from the specific allegations of the petition and other
65 verified affirmations of fact accompanying the petition and application,
66 or subsequent thereto, that there is reasonable cause to believe that (1)
67 the child or youth is suffering from serious physical illness or serious
68 physical injury or is in immediate physical danger from the child's or
69 youth's surroundings, and (2) as a result of said conditions, the child's
70 or youth's safety is endangered and immediate removal from such
71 surroundings is necessary to ensure the child's or youth's safety, the
72 court shall either (A) issue an order to the parents or other person
73 having responsibility for the care of the child or youth to appear at such
74 time as the court may designate to determine whether the court should
75 vest the child's or youth's temporary care and custody in a person
76 related to the child or youth by blood or marriage, a fictive kin caregiver,
77 as defined in section 17a-114, as amended by this act, or [in] some other
78 person or suitable agency pending disposition of the petition, or (B)
79 issue an order ex parte vesting the child's or youth's temporary care and
80 custody in a person related to the child or youth by blood or marriage,
81 a fictive kin caregiver or [in] some other person or suitable agency. A
82 preliminary hearing on any ex parte custody order or order to appear

83 issued by the court shall be held not later than ten days after the issuance
84 of such order. The service of such orders may be made by any officer
85 authorized by law to serve process, or by any probation officer
86 appointed in accordance with section 46b-123, investigator from the
87 Department of Administrative Services, state or local police officer or
88 indifferent person. Such orders shall include a conspicuous notice to the
89 respondent written in clear and simple language containing at least the
90 following information: (i) That the order contains allegations that
91 conditions in the home have endangered the safety and welfare of the
92 child or youth; (ii) that a hearing will be held on the date on the form;
93 (iii) that the hearing is the opportunity to present the parents' position
94 concerning the alleged facts; (iv) that an attorney will be appointed for
95 parents who cannot afford an attorney; (v) that such parents may apply
96 for a court-appointed attorney by going in person to the court address
97 on the form and are advised to go as soon as possible in order for the
98 attorney to prepare for the hearing; (vi) that such parents, or a person
99 having responsibility for the care and custody of the child or youth, may
100 request the Commissioner of Children and Families to investigate
101 placing the child or youth with a person related to the child or youth by
102 blood or marriage or a fictive kin caregiver who might serve as a
103 licensed foster parent or temporary custodian for such child or youth.
104 The commissioner shall investigate any relative or [relatives] fictive kin
105 caregiver proposed to serve as a licensed foster parent or temporary
106 custodian for such child or youth prior to the preliminary hearing and
107 provide a preliminary report to the court at such hearing as to such
108 relative's or [relatives'] caregiver's suitability and any potential barriers
109 to licensing such relative or [relatives] caregiver as a foster parent or
110 parents or granting temporary custody of such child or youth to such
111 [relative or relatives] caregiver; and (vii) that if such parents have any
112 questions concerning the case or appointment of counsel, any such
113 parent is advised to go to the court or call the clerk's office at the court
114 as soon as possible. Upon application for appointed counsel, the court
115 shall promptly determine eligibility and, if the respondent is eligible,
116 promptly appoint counsel. The expense for any temporary care and
117 custody shall be paid by the town in which such child or youth is at the

118 time residing, and such town shall be reimbursed for such expense by
119 the town found liable for the child's or youth's support, except that
120 where a state agency has filed a petition pursuant to the provisions of
121 subsection (a) of this section, the agency shall pay such expense. The
122 agency shall give primary consideration to placing the child or youth
123 with a relative or fictive kin caregiver. If such placement with a relative
124 or fictive kin caregiver is denied, the agency shall give secondary
125 consideration to placing the child or youth in the town where such child
126 or youth resides. The agency shall file in writing with the clerk of the
127 court the reasons for placing the child or youth in a particular placement
128 with a person other than a relative or fictive kin caregiver or outside the
129 town where the child or youth resides, as applicable. If such child or
130 youth is placed with a person other than a relative or fictive kin
131 caregiver, such writing shall include confirmation that the placement
132 selected for such child or youth, rather than placement with a relative
133 or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of such child or youth.
134 Upon issuance of an ex parte order, the court shall provide to the
135 commissioner and the parent or guardian specific steps necessary for
136 each to take to address the ex parte order for the parent or guardian to
137 retain or regain custody of the child or youth. Upon the issuance of such
138 order, or not later than sixty days after the issuance of such order, the
139 court shall make a determination whether the Department of Children
140 and Families made reasonable efforts to keep the child or youth with his
141 or her parents or guardian prior to the issuance of such order and, if
142 such efforts were not made, whether such reasonable efforts were not
143 possible, taking into consideration the child's or youth's best interests,
144 including the child's or youth's health and safety. Any person or agency
145 in which the temporary care and custody of a child or youth is vested
146 under this section shall have the following rights and duties regarding
147 the child or youth: (I) The obligation of care and control; (II) the
148 authority to make decisions regarding emergency medical,
149 psychological, psychiatric or surgical treatment; and (III) such other
150 rights and duties that the court having jurisdiction may order.

151 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2027,
152 the Commissioner of Children and Families shall establish and

153 administer a program to pay stipends to employees of the Department
154 of Children and Families who lead certain courses offered by the
155 department to individuals or the parents or guardians of individuals
156 receiving protective services, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general
157 statutes, or who are under protective supervision, as defined in section
158 17a-93 of the general statutes. The commissioner shall (1) compile a list
159 of the courses for which stipends shall be paid, with priority given to
160 those courses for which the demand is greater than current course
161 availability and that the commissioner determines are most beneficial to
162 families and children in the state, and (2) determine the amount of the
163 stipend to be paid to each employee.

164 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
165 "caregiver" means (1) a caregiver, as defined in section 17a-126 of the
166 general statutes, as amended by this act, (2) an individual who has
167 accepted emergency placement of a child pursuant to section 17a-114 of
168 the general statutes, as amended by this act, and (3) a parent anticipating
169 near-term reunification with such parent's child.

170 (b) There is established a grant program to provide grant payments
171 to caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases and other
172 necessities for children.

173 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
174 Families shall develop (1) an application process, (2) eligibility criteria
175 for caregivers, (3) guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of grant
176 payments by caregivers, and (4) a formula for the distribution of such
177 grant payments, which formula shall include the maximum grant
178 payment available to any caregiver. Priority for such grant payments
179 shall be given to caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance
180 payments or a guardianship subsidy but have not yet received an initial
181 payment or subsidy.

182 (d) Each caregiver who receives a grant payment under this section
183 shall file an expenditure report with the Commissioner of Children and
184 Families at such time and in such manner as the commissioner
185 prescribes. Each such caregiver shall refund to the department any

186 amounts not expended in accordance with the guidelines developed by
187 the commissioner pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

188 (e) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
189 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report to the
190 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
191 section 20 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
192 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
193 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
194 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, the number of
195 applications received by the department, the number of grant payments
196 provided and the amount of each such grant payment.

197 Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section, "after
198 school program" means a program that takes place after regular school
199 hours and provides educational, enrichment and recreational activities
200 for children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, and
201 "caregivers" has the same meaning as provided in section 17a-126 of the
202 general statutes, as amended by this act.

203 (b) There is established a grant program to provide grant payments
204 to caregivers for all or a portion of costs associated with after school
205 programs for children placed in the care of such caregivers by the
206 Commissioner of Children and Families.

207 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
208 Families shall develop (1) an application process, (2) eligibility criteria
209 for caregivers, (3) guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of grant
210 payments by caregivers, and (4) a formula for the distribution of such
211 grant payments, which formula shall include the maximum grant
212 payment available to any caregiver. Priority for such grant payments
213 shall be given to caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance
214 payments or a guardianship subsidy but have not yet received an initial
215 payment or subsidy.

216 (d) Each caregiver who receives a grant payment under this section
217 shall file an expenditure report with the Commissioner of Children and

218 Families at such time and in such manner as the commissioner
219 prescribes. Each such caregiver shall refund to the department any
220 amounts not expended in accordance with the guidelines developed by
221 the commissioner pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

222 (e) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
223 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report to the
224 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
225 section 20 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
226 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
227 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
228 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, the number of
229 applications received by the department, the number of grant payments
230 provided and the amount of each such grant payment.

231 Sec. 6. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
232 "relevant field" means social work, applied sociology, child
233 development, child welfare, clinical psychology, counseling, human
234 development and family studies, human services, marriage and family
235 therapy, nursing, social services, education and criminal justice.

236 (b) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
237 Families, in consultation with institutions of higher education in the
238 state, shall establish a prospective social worker internship program that
239 includes opportunities for internship experiences, job shadowing,
240 support and coaching, and offers participants insight into the
241 professional challenges and rewards associated with social work over
242 the course of not less than one academic semester. The department shall
243 (1) establish (A) an application process and criteria for acceptance in
244 such program, which criteria shall include, but need not be limited to, a
245 requirement that participants are enrolled in a bachelor's or master's
246 degree program in a relevant field, and (B) criteria for the selection of
247 mentors who are employed by the department as social workers, and (2)
248 recruit such employees to participate as mentors in the program.

249 (c) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
250 Families shall establish a first-year social worker mentorship program

251 for newly hired social workers employed by the department. Such
252 program shall include opportunities for job shadowing, support and
253 coaching during each participant's first year of employment as a social
254 worker by the department. The department shall establish (1) an
255 application process and criteria for acceptance in such program, and (2)
256 criteria for the selection of experienced social workers employed by the
257 department to serve as mentors, and recruit such employees to
258 participate as mentors in the program.

259 (d) The Department of Children and Families shall pay a stipend to
260 each intern, mentee and mentor who successfully completes the
261 internship or mentorship program described in subsections (b) and (c)
262 of this section.

263 Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
264 the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with the
265 Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, shall develop
266 and provide a mandatory educational training program for employees
267 of the Department of Children and Families concerning (1) perinatal
268 mood and anxiety disorders, and (2) trauma-informed, nonstigmatizing
269 practices for interacting with individuals suffering from such disorders.
270 Such training program shall (A) include guidance to such employees
271 concerning such disorders and practices, and (B) be offered not less than
272 once every six months thereafter. Each person employed by the
273 department shall complete such training program at least once.
274 Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall complete such training
275 program not later than December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after
276 January 1, 2028, shall complete such training not later than one year after
277 beginning such employment.

278 Sec. 8. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
279 the Commissioner of Children and Families shall, in consultation with
280 the executive director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors,
281 Equity and Opportunity, established pursuant to section 2-127 of the
282 general statutes, develop and provide a mandatory educational training
283 program for employees of the Department of Children and Families

284 concerning human trafficking and trauma-informed, nonstigmatizing
285 practices for interacting with child and adult victims of human
286 trafficking. Such training program shall (1) include guidance to such
287 employees concerning such practices, and (2) be offered not less than
288 once every six months thereafter. Each person employed by the
289 department shall complete such training program at least once.
290 Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall complete such training
291 program not later than December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after
292 January 1, 2028, shall complete such training not later than one year after
293 beginning such employment.

294 Sec. 9. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028,
295 the Commissioner of Children and Families shall develop and provide
296 a mandatory educational training program for employees of the
297 Department of Children and Families concerning cultural sensitivity in
298 the delivery of the department's services and implicit bias, as defined in
299 section 19a-490u of the general statutes. Such training shall (1) include
300 guidance to such employees concerning such issues, and (2) be offered
301 not less than once every six months thereafter. Each person employed
302 by the department shall complete such training program not less than
303 once every two years. Employees hired prior to January 1, 2028, shall
304 initially complete such training program not later than December 31,
305 2028. Employees hired on or after January 1, 2028, shall initially
306 complete such training not later than one year after beginning such
307 employment.

308 Sec. 10. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
309 "postsecondary education" means (1) any program that leads to an
310 academic degree or certification in a vocation, or (2) employment
311 training.

312 (b) Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department of Children and
313 Families shall establish a postsecondary education grant program for
314 the purpose of providing grant payments to fund the postsecondary
315 education of youths committed to the department who consent to
316 remain in the care of the Commissioner of Children and Families upon

317 reaching eighteen years of age pursuant to section 46b-129 of the general
318 statutes, as amended by this act. The department shall establish (1) an
319 application process, (2) a list of postsecondary education programs
320 approved by the department, (3) a formula for the distribution of such
321 grant payments, and (4) eligibility criteria for such youths, provided no
322 such youth shall participate in the program for the first time after such
323 youth reaches twenty-six years of age, but any such youth who
324 participates in such program prior to turning twenty-eight years of age
325 may continue to participate until the completion of such youth's
326 postsecondary education program or such youth reaches twenty-eight
327 years of age, whichever occurs earlier. The department shall require any
328 youth participating in the program to complete for each year such youth
329 is enrolled in postsecondary education, as a condition to such
330 participation, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and
331 applications for any appropriate scholarships and grants, including, but
332 not limited to, through any scholarship application portal administered
333 by the provider of such postsecondary education.

334 (c) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
335 Department of Children and Families shall submit a report to the Child
336 Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee, established pursuant to
337 section 20 of this act, and, in accordance with the provisions of section
338 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the
339 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children.
340 Such report shall include, for the preceding year, the number of
341 applications received by the department, the number of grant payments
342 provided and the amount of each such grant payment.

343 Sec. 11. (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2028, the
344 Auditors of Public Accounts shall conduct a performance audit, as
345 defined in section 2-90c of the general statutes, of the postsecondary
346 education grant program established pursuant to section 10 of this act.
347 Said auditors shall conduct such performance audit in accordance with
348 generally accepted government auditing standards or by another
349 method said auditors deem appropriate. Said auditors shall submit a
350 report, in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the

351 joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of
352 matters relating to children, including such audit and any
353 recommendations for improving the administrative efficiency or
354 effectiveness of such program.

355 Sec. 12. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Not later than January 1, 2027,
356 the Department of Children and Families shall establish an Internet web
357 site that is distinct from the department's Internet web site and includes
358 the following:

359 (1) A public, online dashboard to provide real-time information
360 concerning the department's administration of and performance with
361 respect to the state-wide program of services described in section 17a-3
362 of the general statutes. Such information shall include, but need not be
363 limited to, the information identified by the working group established
364 pursuant to section 13 of this act. Such dashboard shall (A) be integrated
365 with any electronic data collection and tracking tools utilized by the
366 department to ensure that such information is consistently and
367 continually updated, and (B) present such information in a manner that
368 permits users to access and understand such information without
369 specialized knowledge or training.

370 (2) Information for the public concerning offices, programs and
371 services administered and offered by the department, including, but not
372 limited to, the Office of Community Relations, housing and
373 homelessness programs, the Careline established pursuant to section
374 17a-103a of the general statutes and text message programs.

375 (3) Information concerning the identification of child abuse and
376 neglect and how to report child abuse and neglect to the department.

377 (4) The educational training program developed pursuant to section
378 17a-101 of the general statutes, in a video format that members of the
379 public may access without creating a username or password for use on
380 such Internet web site.

381 Sec. 13. (*Effective from passage*) (a) There is established a working

382 group to identify information to be included on the online dashboard
383 established pursuant to section 12 of this act concerning the Department
384 of Children and Families' administration of and performance with
385 respect to the state-wide program of services described in section 17a-3
386 of the general statutes.

387 (b) The working group shall consist of the following members: (1)
388 Members of the General Assembly, as designated by the chairpersons of
389 the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having
390 cognizance of matters relating to children; (2) the Commissioner of
391 Children and Families, or the commissioner's designee; and (3) any
392 individuals such chairpersons deem relevant and necessary to carry out
393 the duties of the working group.

394 (c) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the
395 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children
396 shall serve as administrative staff of the working group.

397 (d) Not later than October 1, 2026, the working group shall submit a
398 report on its findings, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a
399 of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General
400 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. The
401 working group shall terminate on the date that it submits such report or
402 October 1, 2026, whichever is later.

403 Sec. 14. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Upon the removal of a child
404 who is under protective supervision, as defined in section 17a-93 of the
405 general statutes, or receiving protective services, as defined in section
406 17a-93 of the general statutes, by, or caused by, a parent or guardian of
407 such child to a jurisdiction outside the state for a period of more than
408 fourteen days, the Commissioner of Children and Families shall, if such
409 child's location is known, (1) contact the child welfare agency of such
410 jurisdiction to (A) provide information concerning such child's location
411 and status, (B) request that such agency conduct an in-person visit to
412 such child's location for the purpose of evaluating such child's safety,
413 and (C) if such agency indicates they will conduct or have conducted
414 such in-person visit, contact such agency to discuss such agency's

415 findings, and (2) conduct an in-person visit to evaluate such child's
416 safety or, if such in-person visit is not feasible, conduct a visit by means
417 of a video conferencing platform. If after an in-person visit or visit by
418 means of a video conferencing platform conducted pursuant to
419 subdivision (2) of this section, the commissioner has reasonable cause to
420 suspect or believe such child (i) has been abused or neglected, as
421 described in section 46b-120 of the general statutes, (ii) has had a
422 nonaccidental physical injury, or injury that is at variance with the
423 history given of such injury, inflicted upon such child, or (iii) is at
424 imminent risk of serious harm, the commissioner shall notify such
425 agency of such suspicion or belief.

426 Sec. 15. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Evidence that the parent or
427 guardian of a child has voluntarily sought treatment from or is being
428 voluntarily treated by a mental health professional for mental health
429 concerns, including, but not limited to, a perinatal mood or anxiety
430 disorder, shall not form the sole or primary basis for any action or
431 proceeding by the Department of Children and Families, provided
432 nothing in this section shall preclude any action or proceeding by such
433 department based on harm or risk of harm to a child or the use of
434 information concerning such treatment in any action or proceeding
435 where authorized.

436 Sec. 16. Subsection (b) of section 17a-101g of the general statutes is
437 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
438 *1, 2026*):

439 (b) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall establish
440 protocols for the investigation of and response to reports of child abuse
441 or neglect of children from birth to three years of age. Such protocols
442 shall include, but need not be limited to, (1) appropriate supervision of
443 the case, (2) appropriate visitation by department personnel to such
444 children, (3) documentation of case activities relevant to the safety and
445 well-being of such children, and (4) a case supervision tool specific to
446 the unique needs and risk status of children from birth to three years of
447 age. All investigations of a report of child abuse or neglect pursuant to

448 this section shall include a home visit at which the child and any siblings
449 are observed, if appropriate, a determination of the nature, extent and
450 cause or causes of the reported abuse or neglect, a determination of the
451 person or persons suspected to be responsible for such abuse or neglect,
452 the name, age and condition of other children residing in the same
453 household and an evaluation of the parents and the home. During any
454 such observation, department personnel shall consider any opinions
455 expressed by the child or other children residing in the household
456 concerning whether such child was abused or neglected. The report of
457 such investigation shall be in writing. The investigation shall also
458 include, but not be limited to, a review of criminal conviction
459 information concerning the person or persons alleged to be responsible
460 for such abuse or neglect and previous allegations of abuse or neglect
461 relating to the child or other children residing in the household or
462 relating to family violence. After an investigation into a report of abuse
463 or neglect has been completed, the commissioner shall determine, based
464 upon a standard of reasonable cause, whether a child has been abused
465 or neglected, as defined in section 46b-120. If the commissioner
466 determines that abuse or neglect has occurred, the commissioner shall
467 also determine whether: (A) There is an identifiable person responsible
468 for such abuse or neglect; and (B) such identifiable person poses a risk
469 to the health, safety or well-being of children and should be
470 recommended by the commissioner for placement on the child abuse
471 and neglect registry established pursuant to section 17a-101k. If the
472 commissioner has made the determinations in subparagraphs (A) and
473 (B) of this subsection, the commissioner shall issue notice of a
474 recommended finding to the person suspected to be responsible for such
475 abuse or neglect in accordance with section 17a-101k. If the child is
476 represented by an attorney or guardian ad litem, the commissioner shall
477 notify the child's attorney or guardian ad litem in writing not less than
478 five days prior to the date of any meeting in which the department is
479 considering removing the child from the household, except, if the
480 commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, has authorized the
481 immediate removal of a child from his or her household pursuant to the
482 provisions of subsection (e) of this section, the commissioner, or the

483 commissioner's designee, shall not be required to provide advance
484 written notice of such removal to the child's attorney or guardian ad
485 litem.

486 Sec. 17. (*Effective October 1, 2026*) On and after July 1, 2027, the
487 Department of Children and Families shall conduct a public awareness
488 campaign to educate the public concerning the resources and services
489 offered by the department, including, but not limited to, the
490 department's Office of Community Relations, housing and
491 homelessness programs, the Careline established pursuant to section
492 17a-103a of the general statutes and text message programs. Such
493 campaign may include, but need not be limited to, advertisements on
494 television and social media, as defined in section 9-601 of the general
495 statutes.

496 Sec. 18. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) As used in this section,
497 "personal emergency communication device" means a global
498 positioning system-enabled, wearable device that allows an individual
499 to contact local police by pressing a button or through another
500 mechanism.

501 (b) On and after January 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Children and
502 Families shall (1) require the use of personal emergency communication
503 devices by employees of the Department of Children and Families who
504 regularly conduct visits to or evaluations of the homes of children under
505 the supervision of the commissioner, (2) provide such devices to such
506 employees, and (3) develop guidelines and a training program for the
507 use of such devices.

508 Sec. 19. (*Effective July 1, 2026*) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027,
509 the Department of Children and Families shall establish and operate an
510 urgent crisis center, as defined in section 38a-477aa of the general
511 statutes, in the city of Stamford.

512 Sec. 20. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) There is established a
513 Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee. The committee shall
514 evaluate and make recommendations concerning the operation, policies

515 and service outcomes of state agencies providing services relating to
516 and supporting child welfare in the state.

517 (b) The committee shall consist of the following members:

518 (1) Two members appointed by the speaker of the House of
519 Representatives, one of whom shall be a mental health professional
520 employed at an urgent crisis center, as defined in section 19a-179f of the
521 general statutes;

522 (2) Two members appointed by the president pro tempore of the
523 Senate, one of whom shall be a regional social worker supervisor
524 employed by the Department of Children and Families;

525 (3) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the House of
526 Representatives, one of whom shall be a private provider of child
527 welfare services;

528 (4) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one
529 of whom shall be a foster parent licensed pursuant to section 17a-114 of
530 the general statutes, as amended by this act;

531 (5) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the House of
532 Representatives, one of whom shall be an expert in child welfare
533 employed by an institution of higher education in the state;

534 (6) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one
535 of whom shall be a relative or fictive kin caregiver, as defined in section
536 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, with whom a
537 child in the care and custody of the Commissioner of Children and
538 Families has been placed;

539 (7) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing
540 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
541 relating to children;

542 (8) The Commissioner of Children and Families, or the
543 commissioner's designee;

544 (9) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee;

545 (10) The Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, or
546 the commissioner's designee;

547 (11) The Commissioner of Developmental Services, or the
548 commissioner's designee;

549 (12) The Commissioner of Social Services, or the commissioner's
550 designee;

551 (13) The Commissioner of Housing, or the commissioner's designee;

552 (14) The Commissioner of Correction, or the commissioner's
553 designee;

554 (15) The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, or the
555 secretary's designee;

556 (16) The Chief Court Administrator, or the Chief Court
557 Administrator's designee;

558 (17) The Probate Court Administrator, or the Probate Court
559 Administrator's designee;

560 (18) The Chief Public Defender, or the Chief Public Defender's
561 designee; and

562 (19) The Child Advocate, or the Child Advocate's designee.

563 (c) Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing authority. Members
564 of the committee shall serve without compensation.

565 (d) The chairpersons of the joint standing committee of the General
566 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children, or the
567 chairperson's designees, and the Secretary of the Office of Policy and
568 Management, or the secretary's designee, shall serve as cochairpersons
569 of the committee. Such cochairpersons shall schedule the first meeting
570 of the committee, which shall be held not later than sixty days after the

571 effective date of this section. The committee shall meet quarterly, and
572 more often upon the call of the cochairpersons. The cochairpersons may
573 designate subcommittees to carry out the functions of the committee.

574 (e) The committee shall complete its duties under this section in
575 consultation with one or more organizations that focus on relevant
576 issues regarding child welfare, including an independent institution of
577 higher education in the state offering a master's degree in social work.
578 The committee may accept administrative support and technical and
579 research assistance from any such organization.

580 (f) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the
581 committee shall submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of
582 section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of
583 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children,
584 concerning its evaluation and recommendations.

585 Sec. 21. (*Effective from passage*) Not later than January 1, 2027, the
586 Commissioner of Children and Families shall submit a report, in
587 accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes,
588 to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having
589 cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report shall include an
590 analysis of the feasibility of establishing foster care licensure
591 requirements for relative and fictive kin caregivers, as defined in section
592 17a-114 of the general statutes, as amended by this act.

593 Sec. 22. (*Effective from passage*) The Departments of Children and
594 Families and Emergency Services and Public Protection shall conduct a
595 joint study to identify ways to improve (1) communication between said
596 departments with respect to the provision of child welfare services, and
597 (2) existing policies and practices relating to the removal of children
598 from such children's homes pursuant to sections 17a-101g, of the general
599 statutes, as amended by this act, and 46b-129 of the general statutes, as
600 amended by this act. Not later than January 1, 2027, the Departments of
601 Children and Families Emergency Services and Public Protection shall
602 jointly submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-
603 4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General

604 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report
605 shall include the departments' findings and recommendations for
606 improvements.

607 Sec. 23. (*Effective from passage*) The Department of Children and
608 Families and the Office of the Child Advocate shall conduct a joint study
609 to identify ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure
610 the immediate removal from an out-of-home placement made by the
611 Commissioner of Children and Families of any child who becomes a
612 victim of physical or sexual assault occurring in or as a result of such
613 out-of-home placement. Not later than January 1, 2027, the Department
614 of Children and Families and the Office of the Child Advocate shall
615 jointly submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-
616 4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General
617 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. Such report
618 shall include the department's and office's findings and
619 recommendations for improvements.

620 Sec. 24. Subsection (d) of section 17a-126 of the general statutes is
621 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
622 *1, 2026*):

623 (d) The commissioner shall provide the following subsidies under the
624 subsidized guardianship program in accordance with this section and
625 the regulations adopted pursuant to subsection (e) of this section: (1) A
626 special-need subsidy, which shall be a lump sum payment for one-time
627 expenses resulting from the assumption of care of the child and shall not
628 exceed two thousand dollars; and (2) a medical subsidy comparable to
629 the medical subsidy to children in the subsidized adoption program.
630 The subsidized guardianship program shall also provide a monthly
631 subsidy on behalf of the child payable to the caregiver that is based on
632 the circumstances of the caregiver and the needs of the child and shall
633 [not exceed] be equal to the foster care maintenance payment that would
634 have been paid on behalf of the child if the child had remained in
635 licensed foster care.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	October 1, 2026	17a-114(c)
Sec. 2	October 1, 2026	46b-129(b)
Sec. 3	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 4	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 5	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 6	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 7	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 8	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 9	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 10	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 11	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 12	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 13	from passage	New section
Sec. 14	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 15	from passage	New section
Sec. 16	October 1, 2026	17a-101g(b)
Sec. 17	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 18	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 19	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 20	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 21	from passage	New section
Sec. 22	from passage	New section
Sec. 23	from passage	New section
Sec. 24	October 1, 2026	17a-126(d)

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Section 2(b), "relative or relatives or fictive kin caregiver" was changed to "relative or [relatives] fictive kin caregiver", "relative's or relatives' or caregiver's" was changed to "relative's or [relatives'] caregiver's", and "relative or relatives or caregiver" was changed to "relative or [relatives] caregiver", for clarity; in Section 4(c), "recipients" was changed to "caregivers" and "recipient" was changed to "caregiver", for clarity; in Section 4(d), "recipient of" was changed to "caregiver who receives" and "Such recipients" was changed to "Each such caregiver", for clarity; in Section 4(e), "Department of Children and Families Oversight Committee" was changed to "Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee", for accuracy; in Section 5(c), "recipients" was changed to "caregivers" and "recipient" was changed to "caregiver", for

clarity; in Section 5(d), "recipient of" was changed to "caregiver who receives" and "Such recipients" was changed to "Each such caregiver", for clarity; in Section 6(b)(1)(A), "but not be limited to" was changed to "but need not be limited to", and Subdiv. designator (2) was added for clarity; in Section 6(d), "internship and mentorship programs" was changed to "internship or mentorship program", for clarity; in Section 10(a), Subdiv. designators (1) and (2) were added, for clarity; in Section 11, "section 2-09c" was changed to "section 2-90c", for accuracy; in Section 14, "Upon the removal by, or caused by a parent or guardian of a child who is under protective supervision, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general statutes, or who is receiving protective services, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general statutes, to a jurisdiction" was changed to "Upon the removal of a child who is under protective supervision, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general statutes, or receiving protective services, as defined in section 17a-93 of the general statutes, by, or caused by, a parent or guardian of such child to a jurisdiction", for clarity; in Section 14(2), "a visit" was changed to "conduct a visit", for clarity; and in Section 20(e), "including a private institution" was changed to "including an independent institution", for clarity.

KID *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Cost	At least 2,293,900	At least 437,900
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	47,200	113,400
Social Services, Dept.	GF - Cost	See Below	See Below

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill, which establishes several new Department of Children and Families (DCF) programs and services and makes other changes regarding DCF, results in an estimated General Fund cost of at least \$2,341,100 in FY 27 and \$551,300 annually thereafter as described below. This estimate does not include any grant or stipend costs related to such programs created by the bill, as those costs are dependent on the amount of funding provided.

Sections 1 and 2 give emergency placement and court proceedings preference to a child's relative or fictive kin, as well as require written documentation and explanation in instances where the DCF commissioner deviates from such placement preference. This results in

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.82% of payroll in FY 27.

no fiscal impact.

Section 3 requires DCF establish and administer a payment stipend program for employees who lead certain courses for specified DCF-involved individuals and guardians of those individuals. This results in a cost to DCF beginning in FY 27, with half-year costs in the first fiscal year, subject to the number of program-eligible courses and the stipend paid per course leader.

Sections 4 and 5 establish new DCF grant programs for certain caregivers to help cover necessities and after school program costs. This results in a cost of at least \$64,100 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new Grants and Contracts Specialist to administer both grant programs. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.² The costs of the grants are dependent on the funding provided and provisions of the grant programs, with half-year costs in FY 27.

Section 6 requires DCF to establish paid social worker internship and first-year social worker employee mentorship programs. This results in a cost of at least \$96,000 in FY 27 and \$128,100 annually thereafter for one new training program supervisor to implement the mentorship program, including providing training. The annualized salary for this position is approximately \$90,300, plus \$37,800 in fringe benefits.³

There are additional costs to provide participants in both the internship and mentorship programs with stipends beginning in FY 27, with half-year costs in the first fiscal year, subject to provided funding and provisions of each program. For the mentorship program, both the mentee and the mentor are provided stipends.

Sections 7 through 9 require DCF to provide several mandatory employee training programs regarding perinatal mood and anxiety disorder, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity. This results in: (1) a potential cost of up to \$30,000 in FY 28 to develop new trainings; and

² The FY 27 cost is \$45,200 in salary and \$18,900 in fringe benefits.

³ The FY 27 cost is \$67,700 in salary and \$28,300 in fringe benefits.

(2) a cost of \$90,300 (plus \$37,800 fringe benefits) in FY 28 and annually thereafter to hire one training program supervisor who will provide the trainings.

Section 10 expands existing DCF postsecondary education assistance to any youth receiving DCF services post majority who are between 21 and 26 years old, with continued assistance possible until age 28. The bill creates a new grant program for this purpose (and available to younger youth receiving services post majority), resulting in a potentially significant cost to DCF beginning in FY 27 (half-year costs for the first fiscal year) subject to: (1) program participation; and (2) the grant formula. There are approximately 220 youth in DCF services post majority.

DCF currently offers postsecondary education (PSE) financial assistance for youth ages 18 through 20 (with extensions possible through age 23) who were/are: (1) foster children adopted as minors; or (2) either committed to DCF or receive DCF services post majority. An eligible student may receive PSE assistance equivalent to the Central Connecticut State University comprehensive rate. DCF's current agency budget for the PSE program is approximately \$15 million.

Section 11 requires the Auditors of Public Accounts (APA) to conduct a performance audit of the postsecondary education grant program, resulting in no fiscal impact because the APA has the necessary staff and expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 12 requires DCF to create a new website to provide information regarding agency programs and services, including a public online dashboard providing real-time information. This results in a one-time cost to DCF of at least \$100,000 to \$200,000 in FY 27, and an ongoing annual maintenance cost of approximately \$5,000 beginning in FY 28. These costs reflect the bill's requirement to develop and service another website (instead of using DCF's existing website infrastructure).

This preliminary estimate does not consider additional costs related to building the initial dashboard infrastructure such as data connection

and structuring. Costs related to this may be substantial due to the technical complexity of live-update interactive dashboards and the agency's inexperience with the new CT-KIND System. Additionally, costs may vary depending on the capabilities of existing staff and potential need for outside consultants.

While DCF has indicated some data is currently transferrable to a web-based dashboard that is in early development, it is less technically complex than what the bill specifies for update frequency. Additional costs are also dependent on the total amount, availability, and complexity of information required to be included on the dashboard as determined by the working group established in Section 13.

In addition to the dashboard, the new website must also include public information regarding DCF programs and services, information on child abuse and neglect identification and reporting, and free mandated reporter educational training accessible to the public without a username or password. The agency has the capacity to display these existing materials publicly but would incur additional costs if placed on a separate website as required by the bill.

Section 13 establishes a working group to determine additional information to be displayed on the new service dashboard, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 14 mandates an out-of-state child welfare check procedure to be initiated by the DCF Commissioner when a DCF-involved youth is out of state for more than 14 days and their location is known. This results in no fiscal impact as the agency has the capacity to make the required contacts to the appropriate jurisdictional authority as required by the bill.

Section 15 prohibits a caregiver's voluntary mental health treatment from being the basis of DCF action, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 16 requires DCF personnel to consider opinions expressed by children in their investigations, resulting in no fiscal impact.

Section 17 requires DCF to conduct an ongoing public awareness campaign to educate the public about agency resources and services. This results in a potential cost to DCF of \$250,000 to \$500,000 in FY 28 and annually thereafter dependent on the campaign scope. If the agency purchases radio and social media advertising space throughout Connecticut, and tracks the campaign impact through engagement metrics, it may cost the department up to \$500,000 annually.

Section 18 requires the use of personal emergency communication devices for certain DCF staff, resulting in an anticipated net cost of \$81,000 to \$121,500 in FY 27 and \$162,000 to \$243,000 annually thereafter.

The agency would acquire approximately 1,000 to 1,500 units (with an anticipated monthly cost of \$27 each, with no one-time start-up cost) to outfit DCF staff who frequently make in-home visits. The mobile GPS alert units require a recurring subscription to connect to a 24/7 emergency response center. These ongoing costs would qualify for partial reimbursement (50%) through federal Title IV-E funding.

Section 19 requires DCF to establish and operate an urgent crisis center (UCC) in Stamford for the duration of FY 27, resulting in: (1) a cost of \$2 million to \$3.5 million to DCF in FY 27 only; and (2) additional Medicaid costs to the Department of Social Services (DSS).

DCF does not operate or manage any UCCs, but historically has licensed and contracted private providers for this purpose. From FY 23 through FY 25, DCF grant funding through ARPA subsidized the cost of UCC development and care for non-Medicaid eligible children experiencing a mental health crisis. The operational cost to DCF for the new Stamford location is estimated to be similar to past expenditures, dependent on regional service utilization differences.

Current funding for UCCs mainly relies on allocations in the state budget through Medicaid. DSS will incur increased Medicaid costs, which are dependent on Medicaid eligible patients and associated utilization of services at the new UCC.

Section 20 establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee to evaluate recommendations concerning the operation, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies providing child welfare services, resulting in no fiscal impact as the Committee may obtain administrative support from a consulting child welfare organization.

Sections 21 through 23 requires DCF and collaborating agencies to produce new reports on: (1) the feasibility of foster care licensure requirements for relative and fictive care givers; (2) DCF service collaboration with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP); and (3) improving DCF removals from out-of-home placements for child victims of physical or sexual assault in the placements. This results in no fiscal impact, as the agencies have the necessary expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Section 24 makes a conforming change to statute,⁴ resulting in no fiscal impact.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation and participation in the postsecondary education grant program.

⁴ While current law states that subsidized guardianship program subsidies "shall not exceed" equivalent foster care maintenance payments, such payments are already made equal by DCF's rate schedule and regulations.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 5004****AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY.**

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[§§ 7-9 — TRAINING ON PERINATAL MOOD AND ANXIETY, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY](#)

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Requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program for young people who consent to stay in DCF care after turning 18 years old; requires the state auditors to audit the program

§§ 12 & 13 — DCF ONLINE DASHBOARD AND ASSOCIATED WORKING GROUP

(1) Requires DCF to make a public website, separate from their existing website, with an online dashboard and various information related to DCF programs and procedures and child welfare by January 1, 2027, and (2) creates a working group to identify information for the online dashboard

§ 14 — DCF PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD UNDER PROTECTIVE SUPERVISION OR SERVICES IS TAKEN OUT OF STATE BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Requires DCF to carry out various procedures when a child under protective supervision or services is taken out of the state by a parent or guardian, if DCF knows the child's location

§ 15 — PROHIBITION OF USING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AS SOLE OR PRIMARY REASON FOR DCF ACTION

Generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received mental health treatment as the sole or primary reason to pursue any action or proceeding

§ 16 — CONSIDERATION OF CHILD'S EXPRESSED OPINION IN DCF HOME VISITS

Requires DCF personnel to consider children's opinions during home visits when investigating a report of child abuse or neglect of a young child

§ 17 — PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Requires DCF to conduct a campaign to increase public awareness of agency programs

§ 18 — PERSONAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR DCF STAFF DURING HOME VISITS

Requires DCF employees who do visits to the homes of children under DCF supervision to use personal emergency communication devices

§ 19 — URGENT CRISIS CENTER

Requires DCF to establish and operate an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27

§ 20 — CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee charged with making recommendations about the state agencies providing services relating to child welfare

§ 21 — FOSTER CARE LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN CAREGIVERS REPORT

Requires DCF to report on the feasibility of establishing foster care licensure requirements for relative and fictive kin caregivers

§ 22 — DCF AND DESPP COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT AND CHILD WELFARE POLICIES STUDY

Requires DCF and DESPP to study, and report on, improving their communication with one another and their policies on removing children from their homes

§ 23 — IMMEDIATE REMOVAL FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT FROM OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS REPORT

Requires DCF and OCA to study, and report on, ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure a child's immediate removal from an out-of-home placement if they become a victim of physical or sexual assault

§ 24 — SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

Requires the monthly guardianship subsidy for the needs of the child to be equal to, rather than not exceed, the foster care maintenance payment that would have otherwise been paid on behalf of the child

BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes numerous changes to child welfare law. A section-by-section analysis follows.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Various, see below.

§ 1 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN IN EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

Requires, rather than permits, the DCF commissioner to make an emergency placement of a child to an unlicensed relative or fictive kin caregiver if certain conditions are met; requires the commissioner to document in writing the reasons for denying an emergency placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver

The bill requires, rather than permits, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) commissioner to make an emergency placement of a child to a relative or fictive kin caregiver (an unrelated person at least 21 years old who has a significant emotional connection with the child or family) who is not DCF-licensed or -approved when the placement is deemed in the child's best interest. As under current law, DCF must first do a basic family assessment, including a home visit. By law, an "emergency placement" is the placement of a child in the home of a relative or fictive kin caregiver due to the sudden unavailability of the child's primary caretaker.

As part of this process, the commissioner must order a criminal history and child abuse registry check of anyone 18 years old or older living in the home after the placement is approved. By law, the criminal history can result in the denial of the placement and removal of the child. The bill requires the commissioner to document in writing the reason for the denial if the placement was with a relative or fictive kin

caregiver or removal of a child from the relative or fictive kin caregiver's home.

The bill also requires that if a child is placed in the home of a person who is not a relative or fictive kin caregiver, the commissioner must confirm, in writing, that the placement, rather than placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, serves the child's best interests.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 2 — RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN AND ABUSE AND NEGLECT PROCEEDINGS

Explicitly includes a fictive caregiver in the placement options for an abuse and neglect proceeding; requires the state agency to give primary consideration to placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver

The bill explicitly includes a fictive kin caregiver in the list of possible temporary care and custody placement options a court can consider during a child abuse and neglect proceeding. Under current law a court can consider vesting the child's care and custody temporarily with a relative, agency, or other person. It makes the same change under the existing option for the court to order ex parte (on behalf of one party) vesting the child's care and custody temporarily with a relative, agency, or other person. These proceedings are held following a petition to the court alleging child abuse or neglect.

Current law requires the state agency with authority for the child to give primary consideration to placing the child in the town where the child lives. Under the bill the agency must give primary consideration to placement with a relative or fictive kin caregiver. If that placement is denied, the agency must give secondary consideration to placing the child in the town where the child lives.

By law, the agency must file in writing with the court clerk the reasons for a child's particular placement. The bill adds the requirement for the filing to include confirmation that the placement selected for the child, if the placement is not with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, serves the best interests of the child.

The bill makes related minor and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 3 — STIPENDS FOR DCF EMPLOYEES PROVIDING TRAINING

Creates a stipend program for DCF employees providing training to families

By January 1, 2027, the bill requires the DCF commissioner to establish and administer a program to pay stipends to DCF employees who lead certain DCF courses offered to individuals or the parents or guardians of individuals (1) receiving protective services or (2) who are under protective supervision. The commissioner must prioritize the courses where demand exceeds availability and those she finds are the most beneficial to families and children. The commissioner must also make a course list and decide the stipend amount for each employee.

By law, protective services are public welfare services provided to the family following a complaint of abuse, neglect, or abandonment with no ruling on the complaint. This means either there has been no court decision on the complaint or court jurisdiction has not been determined. An order for protective supervision means a court determined that a child was neglected, but DCF or another social agency, at the court's request, is helping to correct the neglect while the child remains in the home (CGS § 17a-93).

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 4 — CAREGIVER GRANT FOR NECESSITIES

Establishes a grant program to make payments to certain caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases, and other necessities for children in their care

The bill establishes a grant program to make payments to caregivers for clothing, food, safety-related purchases, and other necessities for the children in their care. For purposes of the grant a "caregiver" is a (1) caregiver in the subsidized guardianship program, (2) person who has accepted emergency placement of a child by DCF, or (3) parent anticipating near-term reunification with the parent's child.

It requires the DCF commissioner, by January 1, 2027, to develop (1)

an application process; (2) eligibility criteria for caregivers; (3) guidelines for the appropriate spending of grant payments by caregivers; and (4) a distribution formula for the grant payments, which must include the maximum grant payment available to any caregiver. The commissioner must prioritize grant payments for caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance payments or a guardianship subsidy but have not yet received an initial payment or subsidy.

The bill requires each caregiver receiving a grant payment to file an expenditure report with the DCF commissioner in as she determines. A caregiver must refund any amounts not spent in line with the commissioner's guidelines.

By January 1, 2028, and each following year, the DCF commissioner must submit a report to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 20) and the Committee on Children. The report must include, for the preceding year, the number of applications received, the number of grant payments provided, and the amount of each grant payment.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 5 — AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRANTS FOR FOSTER CAREGIVERS

Establishes a grant program giving financial support to caregivers to help cover the cost of after school programs for foster children in their care

The bill establishes a grant program to give financial support to caregivers (those who are licensed or approved by DCF to provide foster care) to cover, either in full or partially, the costs of after school programs for children placed in their care. Under the bill, after school programs take place after regular school hours and provide educational, enrichment, and recreational activities for children grades kindergarten through 12.

Grant payments must be prioritized for caregivers who are eligible for foster care maintenance payments or a guardianship subsidy but have not yet received an initial payment or subsidy.

For the grant program, the bill requires DCF to develop the following by January 1, 2027:

1. an application process;
2. caregiver eligibility criteria;
3. appropriate expenditure guidelines for the caregiver grants; and
4. a grant distribution formula, including the maximum grant available.

Each caregiver who receives a grant must (1) file an expenditure report with DCF and (2) return unexpended funds to DCF.

The bill also requires DCF to annually report on various aspects of the grant program, including the number of applicants and grants provided, to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 20) and the Committee on Children beginning January 1, 2028.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 6 — ESTABLISHMENT OF PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL WORKER INTERNSHIP AND FIRST YEAR SOCIAL WORKER MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Requires DCF to establish a (1) first-year social worker mentorship program for their newly hired social workers and (2) prospective social worker internship program for people enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree program in a relevant field

The bill requires DCF to establish a (1) first-year social worker mentorship program and (2) prospective social worker internship program (in consultation with higher education institutions). Under the bill, DCF must (1) establish both the internship and mentorship program by January 1, 2027, and (2) pay a stipend to each intern, mentee, and mentor who successfully completes either program.

For both programs, DCF must:

1. establish an application process and acceptance criteria,
2. set mentor-selection criteria, and

3. recruit social workers to be mentors.

Prospective Social Worker Internship Program

The bill requires DCF, in consultation with institutions of higher education in Connecticut, to establish a prospective social worker internship program for people enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree program in a relevant field, including, among others, social work, applied sociology, child development, clinical psychology, nursing, social services, education, or criminal justice.

The program, administered through at least one academic semester, must (1) include opportunities for internship experiences, job shadowing, support, and coaching, and (2) offer participants insight into the challenges and benefits of social work.

First-Year Social Worker Mentorship Program

The bill requires DCF to establish a first-year social worker mentorship program for their newly hired social workers. The program, administered during participants' first year as a social worker, must include opportunities for job shadowing, support, and coaching.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§§ 7-9 — TRAINING ON PERINATAL MOOD AND ANXIETY, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Requires training for DCF staff on perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, human trafficking, and cultural sensitivity and implicit bias

The bill requires the DCF commissioner to develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees in three areas: (1) perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, (2) human trafficking, and (3) cultural sensitivity in the delivery of the department's services and implicit bias.

For all three types of training, DCF employees hired before January 1, 2028, must initially complete each training by December 31, 2028. Employees hired on or after January 1, 2028, must initially complete each training not later than one year after beginning employment. The

perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and human trafficking trainings must be completed at least once, and the cultural sensitivity and implicit bias training at least once every two years.

All three trainings must be ready by January 1, 2028, and be offered at least every six months and each training must include the respective guidance to the employees.

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (§ 7)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about (1) perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and (2) trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing practices for interacting with people suffering from these disorders. The commissioner must do this in consultation with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services commissioner.

Human Trafficking (§ 8)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about human trafficking and trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing practices for interacting with child and adult victims of human trafficking. The commissioner must do this in consultation with the executive director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity.

Cultural Sensitivity and Implicit Bias (§ 9)

The DCF commissioner must develop and provide a mandatory educational training program for DCF employees about implicit bias and delivering the agency's services with cultural sensitivity. Under the bill "implicit bias" means an attitude or internalized stereotype that affects a person's perceptions, actions, and decisions in an unconscious way and often contributes to unequal treatment of a person based on their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other characteristic.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§§ 10 & 11 — POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM FOR YOUTHS IN DCF CARE

Requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program for young people who consent to stay in DCF care after turning 18 years old; requires the state auditors to audit the program

The bill requires DCF to establish a postsecondary education grant program by January 1, 2027. The program must give grants to fund postsecondary education, meaning programs that lead to an academic degree, vocation certification, or employment training, for youths who consent to remain in DCF care after turning 18 years old. Under the bill, youths cannot start participating in the program after they turn 26 years old, however youths may continue to participate until they (1) turn 28 years old or (2) complete their postsecondary education program, whichever happens first.

DCF must establish:

1. an application process,
2. a list of DCF-approved postsecondary education programs,
3. a grant distribution formula, and
4. eligibility criteria.

Each year, participants must complete (1) the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and (2) applications for any appropriate scholarships and grants, including any available through a scholarship application portal administered by an education provider.

DCF must annually report on various aspects of the grant program, including the number of applicants and grants provided, to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee (see § 20) and the Committee on Children beginning January 1, 2028.

The bill also requires the Auditors of Public Accounts to (1) conduct a performance audit of the program by January 1, 2028, and (2) submit a report on the audit and any program recommendations to the Committee on Children.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except the provision requiring the program to be audited is effective October 1, 2026.

§§ 12 & 13 — DCF ONLINE DASHBOARD AND ASSOCIATED WORKING GROUP

(1) Requires DCF to make a public website, separate from their existing website, with an online dashboard and various information related to DCF programs and procedures and child welfare by January 1, 2027, and (2) creates a working group to identify information for the online dashboard

The bill requires DCF to make a separate website from the department's existing website by January 1, 2027. The new website must include a public, online dashboard providing information on DCF's state-wide program relating to services for abused, neglected, and uncared for children and youths, as well as children and youths who have mental health needs and substance use disorders. The dashboard also must (1) include information identified by the working group (see *Online Dashboard Working Group* below), (2) be integrated with any electronic data collection and tracking tools DCF uses, and (3) present information in an accessible way.

The website must also include information on:

1. DCF offices, programs, and services, including the Office of Community Relations, housing and homelessness programs, the child abuse and neglect Careline, and text message programs for the public; and
2. child abuse and neglect identification and how to report child abuse and neglect.

The website must also include the mandated reporter video training program in a publicly-accessible format that does not require a username or password.

Online Dashboard Working Group

The bill creates a working group to identify information to be included on the online dashboard. The working group must consist of:

1. members from the General Assembly, as designated by the

Committee on Children chairpersons;

2. any people the chairpersons find relevant and necessary to carry out the duties of the working group; and
3. the DCF commissioner or her designee.

The Committee on Children's administrative staff serve as the working group's administrative staff.

The working group must submit a report with its findings to the Committee on Children by October 1, 2026, and ends on that date or when it submits its report, whichever is later.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except the provision creating the working group is effective upon passage.

§ 14 — DCF PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD UNDER PROTECTIVE SUPERVISION OR SERVICES IS TAKEN OUT OF STATE BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Requires DCF to carry out various procedures when a child under protective supervision or services is taken out of the state by a parent or guardian, if DCF knows the child's location

The bill requires DCF to carry out various procedures when (1) a child who is under protective supervision or receiving protective services is taken out of the state for more than 14 days by a parent or guardian and (2) they know the child's current location.

In this situation, DCF must (1) contact the child welfare agency in the jurisdiction where the child is located (the "local agency") and (2) visit with the child in-person (or virtually if in-person is not feasible) to evaluate the child's safety.

Contacting Relevant Local Agency

When contacting the local agency, DCF must:

1. give the local agency the child's location and status;
2. request that the local agency visit in-person at the child's location

to evaluate his or her safety; and

3. contact the local agency to discuss their findings (if the local agency agreed to visit).

Follow-Up Requirements After DCF Visit

Following DCF's visit, if there is reasonable cause to suspect or believe the child has (1) been abused or neglected; (2) had a nonaccidental physical injury or an injury inconsistent with the history given of it; or (3) is at imminent risk of serious harm, DCF must notify the local agency.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 15 — PROHIBITION OF USING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AS SOLE OR PRIMARY REASON FOR DCF ACTION

Generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received mental health treatment as the sole or primary reason to pursue any action or proceeding

The bill generally prohibits DCF from using evidence that a parent or guardian has voluntarily sought or received professional mental health treatment as the sole or primary reason to pursue any action or proceeding related to harm or risk of harm. Under the bill, this treatment can be sought for mental health concerns including, among others, perinatal mood or anxiety disorders.

But the bill specifies that DCF can still (1) take action when a child is harmed or at risk of harm and (2) use mental health treatment evidence in an action or proceeding if otherwise authorized.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 16 — CONSIDERATION OF CHILD'S EXPRESSED OPINION IN DCF HOME VISITS

Requires DCF personnel to consider children's opinions during home visits when investigating a report of child abuse or neglect of a young child

By law, all DCF investigations into reports of child abuse or neglect for children from birth to age three must include a home visit to, among other things:

1. observe the child and any siblings;
2. evaluate the parents, home, and condition of other children living in the household; and
3. if appropriate, determine the nature and extent of, and who is responsible for, the reported abuse or neglect.

The bill requires that during these home visits, DCF personnel consider any opinions expressed by the child or other children living in the household about whether the child was abused or neglected.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 17 — PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Requires DCF to conduct a campaign to increase public awareness of agency programs

Beginning July 1, 2027, the bill requires DCF to conduct a public awareness campaign to educate the public about the resources and services offered by the department. This must at least include the department's Office of Community Relations, housing and homelessness programs, the Careline (the 24-hour-a-day hotline and online portal for child abuse and neglect complaints), and text message programs. The campaign may include advertisements on television and social media.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 18 — PERSONAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR DCF STAFF DURING HOME VISITS

Requires DCF employees who do visits to the homes of children under DCF supervision to use personal emergency communication devices

The bill requires the DCF commissioner, beginning January 1, 2027, to require all DCF employees who regularly do visits to, or evaluations of, the homes of children under the commissioner's supervision to use personal emergency communication devices. The commissioner must also give the employees the devices and develop guidelines and a training program for their use.

The bill defines “personal emergency communication device” as a GPS-enabled, wearable device that allows an individual to contact local police by pressing a button or through another mechanism.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 19 — URGENT CRISIS CENTER

Requires DCF to establish and operate an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27

The bill requires DCF to establish and operate an urgent crisis center in Stamford for FY 27. Urgent crisis centers are walk-in clinics that provide immediate access to mental health services for children who do not require medical emergency department care.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

§ 20 — CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee charged with making recommendations about the state agencies providing services relating to child welfare

The bill establishes a 28-member Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee. The committee is charged with evaluating and making recommendations about the operation, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies providing services relating to and supporting child welfare in the state. By January 1, 2028, the committee must submit its first annual report concerning its evaluation and recommendations to the Committee on Children.

The committee is made up of members named by position and appointed members. The members named by position are the (1) Committee on Children chairpersons and ranking members and (2) following agency heads or their designees: (a) the commissioners of Children and Families, Education, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Social Services, Housing, and Correction, and (b) the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary, the Chief Court Administrator, the Probate Court Administrator, the Chief Public Defender, and the Child Advocate.

Table: Appointed Committee Members

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Members</i>	<i>Qualifying Description</i>
House speaker	2	One is a mental health professional employed at an urgent crisis center
Senate president pro tempore	2	One is a DCF regional social worker supervisor
House majority leader	2	One is a private provider of child welfare services
Senate majority leader	2	One is a licensed foster parent
House minority leader	2	One is an expert in child welfare employed by an in-state higher education institution
Senate minority leader	2	One is a relative or fictive kin caregiver with whom a child in DCF's care and custody has been placed

Any vacancy will be filled by the appointing authority. Members of the committee serve without compensation.

The Committee on Children chairpersons, or their designees, and the OPM secretary, or the secretary's designee, serve as co-chairpersons. The co-chairpersons must schedule the first committee meeting, which must be held within 60 days after the bill becomes law. The committee must meet quarterly, and more often upon the call of the co-chairpersons. The co-chairpersons may designate subcommittees to carry out committee duties.

The committee must complete its duties under the bill in consultation with one or more organizations that focus on child welfare-related issues, including an independent institution of higher education in the state offering a master's degree in social work. The committee can accept administrative support as well as technical and research assistance from any such organization.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

§ 21 — FOSTER CARE LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR RELATIVE AND FICTIVE KIN CAREGIVERS REPORT

Requires DCF to report on the feasibility of establishing foster care licensure requirements for relative and fictive kin caregivers

The bill requires DCF to report on the feasibility of establishing foster care licensure requirements specifically for relative and fictive kin caregivers to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2027.

By law, a fictive kin caregiver is a person at least 21 years old who is unrelated to a child by birth, adoption, or marriage but has an emotionally significant relationship with either the child or child's family amounting to a familial relationship.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 22 — DCF AND DESPP COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT AND CHILD WELFARE POLICIES STUDY

Requires DCF and DESPP to study, and report on, improving their communication with one another and their policies on removing children from their homes

The bill requires DCF and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to study ways to improve (1) communication between DCF and DESPP on child welfare services and (2) existing policies and practices on removing children from their homes.

The bill also requires DCF and DESPP to report on their findings and associated recommendations to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2027.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 23 — IMMEDIATE REMOVAL FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT FROM OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS REPORT

Requires DCF and OCA to study, and report on, ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure a child's immediate removal from an out-of-home placement if they become a victim of physical or sexual assault

The bill requires DCF and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to jointly study ways to improve department policies and practices to ensure children are immediately removed from out-of-home placements made by DCF if they become a victim of physical or sexual

assault occurring in, or because of, the out-of-home placement (presumably, this would apply when the perpetrator was someone living in the home or with access to it).

The bill also requires DCF and OCA to report on findings of the study and associated recommendations to the Committee on Children by January 1, 2027.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 24 — SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

Requires the monthly guardianship subsidy for the needs of the child to be equal to, rather than not exceed, the foster care maintenance payment that would have otherwise been paid on behalf of the child

By law, the subsidized guardianship program provides three types of subsidies to help guardians and the children in their care. The bill requires that the monthly subsidy that is based on the circumstances of the caregiver and the needs of the child be equal to, rather than not exceed, the foster care maintenance payment that would have been paid for the child if the child had remained in licensed foster care. The current requirement only prevents the payment from being more than the foster care amount; it does not guarantee a certain payment amount.

The subsidy is paid on behalf of the child payable to the caregiver. The bill does not change the one-time special needs subsidy or the medical subsidy.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

BACKGROUND

Related Bill

sHB 5270, favorably reported by the Committee on Children with a change of reference to the Appropriations Committee, raises the age from 21 to 26 years old for the DCF postsecondary education funding program.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 14 Nay 2 (03/05/2026)