

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-137 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF

Title: EARLY CHILDHOOD.

Vote Date: 3/18/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/20/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REASON FOR BILL:

This bill, S.B. 137, is designed to strengthen and modernize Connecticut's early childhood care and education system by improving safety, expanding access, and ensuring higher quality standards across programs. By increasing funding through the Smart Start rate, the bill helps providers better support classrooms and meet the growing needs of young children and families. It also updates licensing standards for day camps to reflect how programs currently operate, ensuring appropriate oversight, while requiring emergency notifications to better protect children in urgent situations. Additionally, the bill enhances child safety by clarifying background check requirements and mandating timely reporting of individuals placed on the child abuse and neglect registry. Together, these changes aim to create a safer, more responsive, and better-resourced early childhood system for Connecticut families.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute makes a correction to the definition of day camp in § 3.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Elena Trueworthy, Interim Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood.

A pediatrician on the Early Childhood Cabinet provides expertise on children's health and developmental outcomes. An increase of \$6,500 per child would allow \$97,500 per Smart Start classroom for 15 children, marking the first increase since July 1, 2014.

The proposed changes replace "day camp" with "youth camp," raise the age limit from 16 to 18, and require licenses for all youth camps, including those in home settings. These

changes expand coverage under emergency notification statutes and close existing loopholes. The Office of Early Childhood, as mandatory reporters, would provide oversight, consistency, and accountability to ensure the safety and welfare of children and staff.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Sandra Carbonari, M.D. FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics, Hezekiah Bearsley Connecticut Chapter.

A pediatrician serving on the Early Childhood Cabinet provides expertise in the physical, mental, and social health of children from birth through young adulthood and advocates for children's well-being at the community level.

Kim Walker, Board Chair, Ct Association of Boards of Education. Increasing grants for preschool programs helps children develop early literacy, math, and problem-solving skills before kindergarten. This preparation reduces early academic disparities and the need for special education services. Research, including the High Scope Perry Preschool Project, shows that high-quality early education leads to higher graduation rates, increased lifetime earnings, and lower crime rates.

Michelle Heimall, Director of Health, Horizons Inc-Camp Horizon.

I support specific changes in the definition of "day camp" as proposed, and as a member of the Connecticut Camp Association, we strive to protect the interests of all participants of the programs and the protection of children.

Josh Wojtyna, Program Team Associate, The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp.

The proposed change to "day camp" in addition to an emergency notification system for youth camps closes loopholes that allow some programs to avoid being classified as camps based on how mealtimes are structured. The new language focuses on how long a program operates and how children enroll, which more accurately reflects what families experience. These clearer standards ensure that programs operating as camps meet consistent safety expectations. The OEC requiring youth camps to share information via an emergency notification system relays timely alerts about nearby emergencies such as severe weather, fires, or other public safety threats is critical to keeping children safe. These updates strengthen safety and improve clarity for youth camps across the state.

General Comments:

Emely Larson, Director-Education, Hartford Stage.

Heather Loae, Camp Director

Anonymous 17, 18 & 22

They state that all day camps should be licensed by the state whether they provide children lunch or not; and all providers should be on the emergency notification list, so that all service providers have the same expectations if there are any situations that may endanger the safety of the children in our care.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Valerie Stolfi Collins, Executive Director, CT. Recreation & Parks Association.

The proposed change needs clarification: sec (A), defines a camp as three days, removes the meal period, and institutes a 3-hour or more criteria sec (B) removes the three-day criteria and lowers this threshold to programs that operate 1 day a week, for 2 hours or longer, if a child is “permitted to enroll” they have the option to enroll to be considered a camp. This definition is far too broad ex. a basketball clinic on a Wednesday morning at 9:00-11:00 am and then the children go home and come back at 5:00-7:00 pm for a recreational swim practice. Another example is an organization hosting a 2-hour soccer clinic from 9:00-11:00 am for 6–10-year-olds and then hosting a separate 2-hour basketball clinic for 8-12-year-olds from 2:00 - 4:00 pm. Both would be included in sec (B) of the proposed definition of a youth day camp because a participant is “permitted to enroll”. Sec (B) should contain 3 days a week or more component and the words “permitted to enroll” be deleted. This example of municipal camp structure goes beyond the licensing and/or statutory requirements.

Jonathan Chechile, Pastor, Congregational Church of Salem

They state that S.B. 137 creates inequity against VB Schools. CT youth camp statute exempts licensing for programs in public schools, accredited private schools, chartered boys', and girls' clubs; and there is no exemption for religious instruction by VBS. A municipal recreation department running an identical five-day morning program for children ages five to twelve faces a different regulatory landscape than programs that provide Bible curriculum. One-week, volunteer-run, church-property, smaller churches in rural and low-income communities will not be able to absorb these costs. The compliance burdens VBS programs cancelled negatively affecting families with limited resources to bear that cost. The Supreme Court's decision in *Tandon v. Newsom* (2021) held that the government may not treat comparable secular activity more favorably than religious exercise. CT has its a Religious Freedom Restoration Act that requires the government to demonstrate a compelling state interest and to use the least restrictive means before burdening the free exercise of religion.

Sarah Dzialo

The \$315 day camp registration for non-profits negatively affects churches offering free summer VBS programs to any/all children by volunteers provides a tremendous service to working parents who need summer childcare. Licensing fees imposed on private businesses and non-profits by the administrative class typically get passed onto consumers, risk closing summer camps like VBS out of existence. Ct needs to make it easier for services to be offered, for supply to meet demand, and for new products to enter the market, producing competition and therefore lower costs for everyone.

Anonymous 1735

The bill as drafted imposes significant unfunded mandates and administrative burdens that threaten the viability of non-profit youth camps and early childhood providers programs operating for as little as three hours a day. The civil penalties of up to \$100 per day for failure to immediately notify the OEC of criminal convictions is complex and expensive for community-based non-profit programs like specialized museum workshops, local arts clinics, and neighborhood enrichment sessions. These programs often operate on razor-thin margins, lack the administrative capacity and financial support.

Reported by: Maxine Tulloch-Henry

Date: March 30, 2026

